



COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS: NAVIGATING CONFLICT AND DIPLOMACY

DELIA POP-FLANJA AND LAURA-MARIA HERȚA
(EDITORS)

PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ

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Introduction:

Diplomacy and Conflict in a Globalized World

Laura-Maria Herța and Delia Pop-Flanja

Diplomacy and conflict

There are two major concepts tackled in this book, namely diplomacy and conflict. The overall goal is to show how they both shape states' behaviours, interests, and how they can be best understood in a globalized world through processes of interaction and communication dynamics.

According to George Voskopoulos, the origin of the word diplomacy derives from the Greek verb *diplono* meaning *to fold* and referred to the folding metal plates used in Roman time as formal documents (passports, passes etc.). The most basic definition of the term "diplomacy" considers diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy used in order to achieve certain goals considered to be vital to a state. As such, "it is a peaceful means of achieving goals through established diplomatic routes through the use of certain accredited agents."¹

Harold Nicolson defines diplomacy as "an ordered conduct of relations between one group of human beings and another group alien to themselves." He also elaborates this definition by calling it "the need to be informed of the ambitions, weaknesses and resources of those with whom one hopes to deal." Therefore, diplomacy is a peaceful means of implementing national strategy through *win-win* approaches.²

According to Brian White, one way of defining diplomacy is connected to the term's relation to two major perspectives in world politics. They could be labelled as the "macro" perspective and the "micro" one. The macro perspective explains world politics as a whole. The micro perspective explains world politics from the position of states as actors involved in world politics. Therefore, "diplomacy in world politics refers to a communications process between international actors that seeks through negotiation to resolve conflict short of war. This process has been defined, institutionalized and professionalized over many centuries."³ Moreover, "diplomacy in foreign policy refers to the use of diplomacy as a policy instrument possibly in association with other instruments such as military force to enable an international actor to achieve its policy objectives."⁴

¹ George Voskopoulos, *Diplomacy and International Relations*, Sheffield University, South East European Research Centre, 2010.

² See Harold Nickolson, *Diplomacy*, London, Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 26.

³ Brian White, "Diplomacy", in John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 317-319.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

There are several usages for the term “diplomacy”. Links between international relations and international history are present in the notion of *diplomatic history* and are helpful in showing the interchangeability of terms. References to “British diplomacy”, “Russian diplomacy” or “South African diplomacy” are not suggesting diplomacy as such; instead, they are references to British, Russian, or South African foreign policy as a whole.⁵

On the one hand, from the “macro” perspective of world politics, diplomacy refers to a process of communication that is central to the interactions and workings of the global system. If world politics is reduced simply to the tensions between conflict and cooperation, then diplomacy and war could represent the respective institutions.

WORLD POLITICS	
CONFLICT	COOPERATION
WAR	DIPLOMACY

Source: Brian White, “Diplomacy”, in John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

In this representation, diplomacy is located at the cooperation end and refers to “forms of interaction that focus on the resolution of conflict by dialogue and negotiation. Diplomacy therefore is fundamentally related to attempts to manage and to create order within a global system, the object being to prevent conflict spilling over into war.” On the other hand, from the “micro” perspective of international actors like states, an understanding of diplomacy provides insights into the behaviour of the actors themselves in the global system. Thus, from this perspective, “diplomacy can be identified as a policy instrument rather than a global process.” All actors/states have objectives or goals towards which foreign policy is directed. In order to achieve such goals, actors/states need means, which are usually called policy instruments.⁶

The term “conflict” is central to all theoretical approaches in the fields of International Relations, Security Studies, Conflict Resolution, and Communication Sciences. It is believed to be ubiquitous in world politics (in Realist ontology), it is something that needs to be avoided and replaced by cooperation (in Liberal views), it is a likelihood, just as peace and cooperation are, depending on states’ interactions and shared knowledge (in constructivist theorizing), it is an inherent part of human life (in Conflict Resolution scholarship).

Several definitions can be included here, but we shall focus on those that are relevant for our case studies. Consequently, “a conflict is a clash between antithetical ideas or interests – within a person or involving two or more persons, groups or states pursuing mutually incompatible goals. [...] Conflicts may have a predominantly civil and internal dimension or may take on transnational or even global forms. Each and every conflict has its own history, features and dynamics. Since conflict is a social phenomenon, it is an inevitable part of human

⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶ *Ibidem.*

interaction.”⁷ Morton Deutsch assumed that “conflict is potentially of individual and social value; his basic question was how to prevent conflicts from being destructive.”⁸ Johan Galtung viewed conflict as “two or more individuals or groups pursuing mutually competing goals with opposing interests and needs.”⁹ Friedrich Glasl defined social conflict as “an interaction involving at least two parties (individuals, groups, states) with at least one party experiencing differences (distinctions, contradictions, incompatibilities etc.) in perception, thinking, imagination, interpretation, feeling (sympathy – aversion, trust – mistrust) and desires (needs, objectives, purposes, goals) to the other party in such a way as to make them feel that the potential for the realization of their ideas is affected.”¹⁰

The United States Institute of Peace defines “conflict analysis” as “the systematic study of the profile, causes, actors and dynamics of conflict. It is the first step in *conflict transformation* and *peacebuilding*. It undertakes a careful inquiry into the potential course of a conflict so that a roadmap for transformation can be created.” In this view, one essential endeavour is to identify the root causes, but conflict dynamics and relationship patterns are equally important components of conflict analysis.¹¹

Some intertwined terms are “conflict transformation”, “conflict management”, “conflict resolution”, which should include important structural changes, but also changes in attitudes and behaviours (from violent or antagonistic to non-violent and cooperation-prone). Here, conflict transformation “implies that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and transformed” as well.¹² According to many scholars and practitioners, the idea behind all tools, mechanisms, and activities associated with resolving conflicts is that “the future is not seen as conflict free, but as one where bonds and models exist that conflict parties can use to find further resolutions instead of resorting to violence.”¹³ As explained by Morton Deutsch, the aim of conflict resolution is not to eliminate conflict from inter-group relation, from societies, since this is embedded in human life.¹⁴ Rather, the goal is “to transform actually and potentially violent conflict into peaceful (non-violent) processes of social and political change.”¹⁵

All chapters included in this volume revolve around issues pertaining to communication, as essential tool in diplomacy, and to conflict and crises in world politics. The next section will briefly present the structure of this book.

⁷ Berghof Foundation (ed.), *Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation*, 2012, p. 10.

⁸ Morton Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1973, quoted in *ibidem*, p. 11.

⁹ Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means – Peace and Conflict*, Oslo: PRIO, 1996, quoted in *ibidem*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Friedrich Glasl, *Confronting Conflict: A First-Aid Kit for Handling Conflict*, Stroud: Hawthorn Press, 1999, quoted in *ibidem*, p. 11.

¹¹ Berghof Foundation, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹² Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Polity Press, 2018, pp. 34-35.

¹³ Berghof Foundation, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Deutsch, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Contributors and Perspectives

This volume is the result of valuable contributions from experts across various disciplines, including communication studies, international relations, security studies, diplomacy, conflict resolution and mass-media. Their insights offer valuable perspectives and practical strategies for effective crisis communication and conflict resolution mechanisms.

The aim of paper authored by Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean and Mihaela-Adriana Oprescu is to determine whether the language, style, and communication strategies of the European Commission, particularly the ones used in the country reports, have undergone notable changes over the course of the last 20 years. This topic is of utmost importance, particularly in the context of the long-discussed integration of Western Balkan countries and the enlargement occasioned by Russia's war against Ukraine.

Eyal Buvilski focuses in his article on a crucial component of strategic management, namely corporate diplomacy. Since intercultural communication skills are essential for a corporate diplomat, the author also delves into this domain, moving from the theories of Hofstede or Schwartz to more practical facets related to specialized training and coaching. Additionally, this study provides instances that highlight the importance of intercultural comprehension and stakeholder participation.

Yu Yang and Huabin Wang propose an analysis of the crisis response and self-legitimizing discourse of Malaysian Airlines (MAS) and the Malaysian Establishment (GOV). Hence, apart from the fact that the case analysed is renowned and was impactful not only at a national but also at an international level, the value of the article also stands in the fact that it combines the domains of crisis communication, image repair, and institutional communication, and it offers valuable insights for scholars and practitioners seeking to understand and navigate the multifaceted challenges of managing similar crises.

Ramona Alexandra Neagoș tackles another highly topical subject, namely EU's mediation endeavours in the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. Since Russia's war against Ukraine has put EU's enlargement process and the integration of the Western Balkans on top of the agenda, gaining confidence in its mechanisms and brining new approaches to international mediation have become even more important and, at the same time, more challenging in a region where misinformation and fake news alter perceptions and cast doubt on the scopes of external actors.

Yusuf Avar focuses on a different challenge within the EU, namely the migration crisis and the aspects related to the sovereignty of the member states as well as the questioning the decision-making process that this crisis generated. Even though it is widely known that Hungary's Prime Minister Victor Orbán was an opponent of the European Union's plan to share migrants across the 28 states under a mandatory quota system, the element of novelty brought by this article, by is the identification of specific strategies used by Orban in his speeches to justify his opposition based on the idea of national identity and on the us versus them narrative.

With the contribution of Claudiu-Bogdan Aldea, the analysis of international conflicts moves to a different region, more precisely to Japan's crisis management and foreign policy in the context of the Trump Administration, the coronavirus pandemic, and the War in Ukraine.

Employing a socio-constructivist approach, the paper offers possible answers to how Japan's approaches connected with these three major global events and the normative consequences of those actions, deepening our understanding of its role in the international arena.

Moving forward from the Japanese to the Chinese political sphere, Carmen Ștefania Duță brings into discussion the communicative strategies used by Carrie Lam, the fourth Chief Executive of Hong Kong, during the 2019-2020 protests. This analysis highlights the importance of strategic communication in crisis situations, as Lam's flawed approach contributed not to mitigating but to escalating conflict, culminating in the passing of the National Security Law and the end of her term as Chief Executive.

The study of Ana Ursachi contributes to the international approach to crisis communication and conflict resolution of this volume by turning towards the Sahel region. The author uses descriptive-empirical and historical-interpretive methodologies to investigate the primary components and important players in the rise and expansion of narcoterrorism in this area characterized by political instability and complex inter-ethnic tensions.

George Horațiu Bontea analyses several outcomes of the death of young Mahsa Amini in 2022, which led to a series of protests in Iran against the Guidance Patrol. Based on Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony and on discourse analysis, some of the questions that Bontea answers in his research focus on whether the demonstrations that followed this tragic incident can be interpreted as a backlash against the Iranian regime and its core values, the start of a social movement, or as a form of progressive hegemony, thus illustrating the complex interplay between power, ideology, and resistance in contemporary Iran.

We conclude our volume with a study of Iulia-Anamaria Ghidui on the contemporary Romanian mass media, more precisely on the status quo of cultural journalism and its representation in the printed press. The analysis of various articles in the local and national press is doubled by the interviews conducted with two cultural journalists from Cluj-Napoca, which adds value to the study by providing insights into the perspectives of practitioners in the field and the challenges they are faced with in the context of rapidly evolving digital alternatives.

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A Critical Look at the Invariably Rigid Language of the European Commission's Country Reports

Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean and Mihaela-Adriana Oprescu

Abstract

The enlargement policy of the European Union has gained prominence amid Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, prompting more interest in the progress attained by the candidate countries. This research performs a comparative analysis of the country reports drafted by the European Commission on East-Central EU candidates, in the early-2000s, and those pertaining to the four Western Balkan countries negotiating their membership at this time. The purpose of the endeavour is to see whether the language, style and communication strategy of the Commission has met with notable change over the 20-year period, with observations on the choice of phrases, evaluation scales, clichés and more, based on a selection of common topics that constitute useful case studies within the two groups of countries.

Keywords: EU enlargement policy, country reports, East-Central EU member states, Western Balkans

Research design

The practice of drafting annual country reports within the scope of EU enlargement remains to this day one of the most elaborate and impactful endeavours of the European Commission (EC), as the managing authority of this policy. One could argue that the process met its heyday in the early-2000s, when the most complex set of negotiations took place, with 12 countries, 10 of which were from the East-Central area. However, following the onset of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, in February 2022, it appears that the brakes which had been set on enlargement by the former Juncker Commission are gradually being released, amid the rekindled interest in the security and reliability of the EU's immediate neighbourhood. However, one should not rush when making assumptions about the prompt successful completion of the process, since the openness the EU exhibited to the Western Balkans (WB) amid the wars in the 1990s has not led to the ultimate goal of enlargement.¹⁶ The new context brings to the forefront exciting research potential stemming from the analysis of the EC's country reports through the comparative lens that examines the 2004-2007-2013 enlargement waves and the rather thorny files of the WB.

¹⁶ Veronica Anghel, Jelena Džankić, "Wartime EU: consequences of the Russia – Ukraine war on the enlargement process", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2023, pp. 487-501, [<https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2023.2190106>], date consulted: 12 October 2023.

This paper chiefly focuses on the manner in which the EC drafts the country reports, based on the most prominent chapters of the *acquis*, by means of an analysis of the choice of language and overall tone, as well as of the scales utilised in order to assess levels of progress. Such reports from the two periods considered have also been scanned from the standpoint of style, argumentative thread and scientific soundness, in what is meant to be a critical assessment thereof, as we postulate that their rigidity is in part a reflection of, if not an underlying cause for, the slow-paced progress of what is arguably the most far-reaching policy tool of the EU.¹⁷ A more technical view is used when commenting on the language strategies through which the EC conveys such attitudes as appreciation, effectiveness, criticism and urgency, especially to see whether the well-documented Brussels jargon¹⁸ is preventing the texts from being clear, useful or even accessible to the public in the context of the genuine need for more enlargement support on the part of the people in the WB and elsewhere. The permanent comparative outlook also engenders insights into the evolution of enlargement reports and the learning that comes with experience for the chronically technocratic EC¹⁹.

Methodologically, we considered that parsing through the country reports of East-Central European (ECE) candidate states and those of the four WB countries that have been recognised as candidates the longest (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) would provide a relevant database of texts.²⁰ Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine and Moldova have only been granted the candidate status after Russia's war began, so there is not enough material available on them that could prompt valid comparisons from the standpoint of this research, albeit the methods we propose are likely to replicate this study with such countries in the target group, in several years' time.

From a temporal viewpoint, the choice has been to look at the reports from the three consecutive years prior to accession, for the former group of states, and at those for 2020, 2021 and 2022 (the most recent available at this time), for the latter. The time frame allows for a pertinent analysis of continuity in the type of language utilised and forms a solid comparative basis, despite the 20-year gap between the two sets of enlargement dossiers. Indeed, we acknowledge that, while the *acquis* chapters and overall purpose of the EC's monitoring remain quite similar, the newer, cluster-based approach in place for the WB renders the process more orderly and produces certain notable differences in the manner in which the texts of the reports are organised.

¹⁷ Laura-Maria Herța, "Uniunea Europeană - putere normativă, putere civilă", in Nicolae Păun (ed.), *Uniunea Europeană în contextul unei lumi în schimbare. Fundamente istorice, valori, instituții, politici*, Ed. Academiei Române, Bucharest, 2017, pp. 869-879.

¹⁸ Christian Rauh, "Clear messages to the European public? The language of European Commission press releases 1985–2020", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2023, pp. 683-701, [https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2022.2134860], date consulted: 12 October 2023.

¹⁹ This also reflects on the type of narrative and stylistics promoted by the European institutions, cf. Radu Albu Comănescu, "Unitas multiplex—ou pour un autre discours sur l'Europe", *Synergies Roumanie*, no. 13, 2018, pp. 51-60, [https://gerflint.fr/Base/Roumanie13/albu_comanescu.pdf], date consulted 12 October 2023.

²⁰ The European Commission's enlargement reports are available in the Archive of European Integration of the University of Pittsburgh, <http://aei.pitt.edu/>. The reports on the Western Balkans are available on the website of DG NEAR, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/strategy-and-reports_en].

As a next step, we mapped the ECE and WB reports according to 23 topics of interest and the overall progress thereof, in keeping with the complexity of the acquis, but by selecting niche elements that are not so broad as to correspond to one of the 35 chapters per se. Given our extensive experience with Romania's EU integration dossier, this was taken as a point of reference, which is why all of the 23 topics are encountered in the country's reports, with one unique occurrence and several rare ones. This does not imprint a Romanian perspective on the research, but acknowledges the complexity of the country's protracted EU negotiations, which have been studied in other research papers.²¹ In keeping with the Copenhagen criteria and with the structure of the EC reports, the topics chosen have been divided into two major categories. The former, ampler, corresponds to the political accession criterion and tackle the thorniest chapters of the acquis, namely 23 - Judiciary and fundamental rights and 24 - Justice, freedom and security²², with certain items germane to the administrative capacity to manage the prerequisites of enlargement. The latter, somewhat plainer, approaches five economic markers that reflect the breadth of requirements that pertain to the functioning of the single market.²³ A simple evaluation scale has been developed to assess the overall tone of the EC reports for the period under investigation, with three evaluation levels, serving as an introductory comparative tool. If the item did not occur in the reports with a degree of significance, "na" was added to the table.

²¹ For example: Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean, "Un rappel de la déclaration de Snagov une décennie après l'intégration de la Roumanie dans l'Union européenne", *Synergies Roumanie*, no. 12, 2017, pp. 25-36, [<https://gerflint.fr/Base/Roumanie12/corpadean.pdf>], date consulted: 12 October 2023.

²² Marina Matić Bošković, Jelena Kostić, "New EU enlargement strategy towards the Western Balkans and its impact on rule of law", *Slovak Yearbook of European Law*, vol. 1, 2021, pp. 37-58, [<https://doi.org/10.54869/syeul.2021.1.248>], date consulted: 12 October 2023.

²³ Monica Burcă-Voicu, Mihaela-Adriana Oprescu, "A brief analysis of the enlargement process for the Western Balkans states. Synthetic evaluation of the integration path within the competitiveness policy", *Online Journal Modelling the New Europe*, no. 34, 2020, pp. 157-167, [<http://neweurope.centre.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/8.pdf>], date consulted: 12 October 2023.

Topic	RO	PL	HU	CZ	SK	SI	LT	LV	EE	BG	HR	SB	ME	AL	MK
Frequent regulation through emergency ordinances	-	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
Reform, transparency and professionalisation of public administration	-	-	+	+-	-	-	+	+-	-	+-	+-	+-	-	+-	-
Dialogue and consultation with the business community and NGOs	+	+	-	+	+	+-	+-	-	+	+	+	+-	+-	-	+
A capable ministerial structure for EU Integration	+	+	+	+-	+-	+-	+	+-	+	+	+	+-	+-	+-	+
Decentralisation	+	+	+	+	-	+	+-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+-	-
Demilitarisation of the police	+	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	+	na	na	na	na	na
Merit-based selection and promotion of magistrates	-	+	+	na	+	na	-	+-	+-	-	-	+-	-	+	+
Independence of the judiciary	-	+	+	+-	+-	+-	+-	+-	+	+-	-	+-	-	+-	+-
Fight against corruption	-	-	+	-	-	+	+-	+-	+	+-	+-	+-	+-	+-	+-
A functioning Ombudsman	+	+	+	+-	na	+	+	na	+	-	+	+-	+	+-	+
Child protection and the childcare homes system	-	+	+-	+-	-	na	+-	+-	+	-	-	-	+-	+-	-
Treatment of the Roma minority	-	+	+-	+-	-	+	+	na	na	-	+	+-	+-	+-	+-
The right to use minority languages in education	+	na	na	na	+-	na	+-	+	+	na	+-	-	+	-	+-
Trafficking in human beings	-	+	+	-	+-	+	+	+-	+	+	+	-	+	-	+
Organised crime	+	-	+	-	-	+	+-	+-	+	-	+	-	+-	+-	+-
Prison system conditions	-	-	-	+-	na	-	+-	+-	+-	-	+-	+	+	-	-
Restitution of properties confiscated under previous regimes	-	-	na	+	na	+	+	na	+-	+	+	+	-	-	-
Representation of women in political/economic life	-	-	-	+	+-	+-	+	+-	+	-	+-	-	-	+-	+-
GDP/capita convergence	-	+	+	-	+-	+-	-	+	+	+-	-	+-	+-	-	-
Unemployment	+	-	+	-	-	+-	-	-	-	-	-	+-	+-	-	+-
Fiscal consolidation	+	-	-	+-	+-	+	+	-	+	+	+-	-	+	-	+-
Privatisation	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+-	+	+	-	+-	+-	+	+
Banking regulatory system	+	+	+	+-	+-	+-	+	+	+-	+	+	+	+	+	+

Table 1: Basic assessment of the progress attained by ECE and WB countries in the period envisaged, based on annual EC reports. Source: authors' compilation.

A linguistic approach has enabled the authors to follow keywords and recurrent phrases in the 45 documents, on the basis of the subjects exhibited in the table above, with synonymy considered due to the relative lack of uniformity in the language thereof. This served as an access point to extensive qualitative analyses directed towards content description, narrative style, portrayal of progress vs. criticism, choice of wording, euphemistic formulas and strength of requirements, inter alia. The findings have been corroborated with the literature on ECE and WB enlargement to check for discrepancies and identify the potential for novelty.

Findings

The importance of this analysis is amplified by the interest the EU has shown in a revamped enlargement policy post-February 2022, which also comes against the background of internal and external threats to the process, most notably with regard to the WB. From within the EU, populist and nationalist parties²⁴, chiefly amid election debates, start playing the dangerous card of Ukraine war fatigue, as it became apparent with Robert Fico's election victory in Slovakia in the September 30th, 2023 vote²⁵, with Poland's PiS turning to a similar type of rhetoric in anticipation of October 15th parliamentary elections. From the dusty antechamber of the EU, Turkish President Erdoğan uttered on October 1st that Ankara "no longer expects anything from

²⁴ Sergiu Gherghina, Sergiu Mișcoiu, Sorina Soare, "How far does nationalism go? An overview of populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe", *Political Populism*, Nomos, 2017, pp. 193-208.

²⁵ Krisztina Than, Jan Lopatka, "Analysis: Fico's win in Slovakia shows war fatigue in CEE but no major policy turn", *Reuters*, 2 October 2023, [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ficos-win-slovakia-shows-war-fatigue-cee-no-major-policy-turn-2023-10-02/>], date consulted: 12 October 2023.

the European Union, which has kept us waiting at its door for 40 years".²⁶ More worrying examples can follow, if only from the treasure trove of duplicitous pre-accession statements which is Serbia's Vučić administration.

In this context, the European Commission's role as the key authority in the pre-accession phase is meant to be strengthened by the practice of better, more legible and fairer annual reports, serving as inputs for sparking political will within the enlargement policy. Its experience with such démarches is unquestionable, as proved by what is bound to remain by far the most complex EU-related negotiation endeavour in integration history, i.e. the 2004-2007 shockwave. Not unlike then, the stakes of its actions are still closely scrutinised at present, and not only by Eurosceptics, from the viewpoint of the strained budgetary resources of the EU, with the new IPA (III) boasting a mere €14 billion for the current multiannual cycle.²⁷ With the national recovery and resilience plans in their incipient phase, and post-Covid recovery still lagging in several member states, the costs of the war in Ukraine, the threat of Russia's hybrid warfare²⁸ and the prospects of footing the costs of at least part of the immense reconstruction bill of the aggressed candidate country are righteously causing concerns among EU accountants. All of this will make the past PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD saga appear like a drop in the ocean in terms of management, as well as accountability before EU citizens. But, the EU cannot put a damper on the responsibilities accruing from the enlargement policy at this point in time, when the geopolitical argument has grown so much to the detriment of the technocratic approach to the tedious pre-accession process, in spite of the evident need for internal institutional reform.²⁹

It is with such arguments in mind that we proceeded to an analysis of the country reports, as it ensues from the methodological specifications above, whilst acknowledging the persistence of the Copenhagen criteria and *acquis*-driven design thereof. Granted, the EU is bound to approach such documents in a professional manner, with immense databases such as Eurostat behind it, but its tendency to follow a rather dogmatic path in the sensitive depiction of accession progress accounts for the linearity of the overall process.

Parsing through the reports with the critical eye of the researcher is perhaps not the fairest way to conduct our analysis, since it is evident that the lead recipients of such documents are much more diverse. However, in the light of our previous observation germane to Eurostat, it becomes surprising that the scientific style is not utilised with more acumen, so as to raise the

²⁶ "Turkey strikes PKK bases in Iraq after Ankara bombing", *Euractiv*, 2 October 2023, [<https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/turkey-strikes-pkk-bases-in-iraq-after-ankara-bombing>], date consulted: 13 October 2023.

²⁷ Antoanela-Paula Mureșan, Elena Grad-Rusu, "L'opportunité des fonds de pré-adhésion à l'Union européenne. Comparaisons entre l'Europe centrale et orientale et les Balkans occidentaux. Étude de cas - leçons tirées de l'expérience de la Roumanie", *Synergies Roumanie*, no. 16, 2021, pp. 131-143, [http://gerflint.fr/Base/Roumanie16/muresan_grad.pdf], date consulted: 13 October 2023.

²⁸ Laura-Maria Herța, "Russia's Hybrid Warfare. Why Narratives and Ideational Factors Play a Role in International Politics", *On-line Journal Modelling the New Europe*, no. 21, 2016, pp. 52-76, [<http://neweurope.centre.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Online-journal-No.-21-December-2016.pdf>], date consulted: 13 October 2023.

²⁹ Radu Albu Comănescu, "Beyond Western Balkans Integration: Scenarios for the EU Institutional Aftermath", in Laura Herța, Adrian Corpădean, (eds.), *International Relations and Area Studies: Focus on Western Balkans (Proceedings of International Conference: International Relations and Area Studies: Focus on Western Balkans, 4th-5th of December 2020, Cluj-Napoca Romania)*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, pp. 307-321.

credibility of the moulds of data so many observations in the documents rely upon. Indeed, for most of the statistics presented by the Commission, even the particularly sensitive ones, for instance referring to census data or estimates of the size of national minorities' communities, the practice of "data plus source" is largely absent. A uniform citation system in these, and other situations, would greatly enhance the professional allure of the reports, while making researchers' and media investigators' jobs a lot simpler. As for metadata, a topic at which the Eurostat colossus once again excels, there is a gaping hole in the reports, which could be filled with a change in perspective on the part of DG NEAR.

A degree of unwanted ambiguity is instilled by the presence of so-called "weasel words", or unclear sources of information, for instance in the guise of quotations. Examples from the country reports on Romania include: "Reports from human rights organisations provide evidence that (...)"³⁰, or "The Report draws on numerous sources of information".³¹ The length-related restrictions that apply may be the factors leading to such formulas, but we argue that the credibility of key data may suffer from the ambiguity engendered by these generalisations. GDPR has not been of particular help either, since we note that the newer reports, affected by its - otherwise mostly welcome - clauses refrain from naming certain private entities or individuals, thus adding to the blur factor.

The same criticism does not apply to the quality of the grassroots observations on the core areas of accession, which denote the unique ability of the EC to "descend" into the entrails of the countries scrutinised, especially when it comes to non-negotiable core values.³² Since enlargement is fuelled by more willingness on the part of the EU taken as a whole, the recent reports on the four WB countries that are more advanced in their integration bids - Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia - appear to be more congenial to the national ministries and agencies that have a grasp on the technical processes. This is likely a confidence booster and a way of maintaining functional partnerships for dialogue, which was less present in the old, ECE monitoring dossiers.

In spite of the above, it should be pointed out that the vocabulary the Commission resorts to in order to convey criticism is far more varied than the positive formulas it uses. Moreover, both the negative and the positive observations tend to be draped in as impersonal a tone as possible, with a proclivity for the use of the passive voice/style. To exemplify, we may refer to the following statements: "specific concerns exist relating to the transposition of the acquis", "the continued reliance on ordinances as a legislative tool is a cause for concern" and "There continue to be consistent and credible reports of degrading treatment by the police".³³ The euphemistic potential of passive sentences is well documented and can be considered in keeping with the

³⁰ European Commission, "2002 Regular Report on Romania's progress towards accession", 2002, p. 37, [https://aei.pitt.edu/44604/1/romania_2002.pdf], date consulted: 13 October 2023.

³¹ European Commission, "2004 Regular Report on Romania's progress towards accession", 2003, p. 4, [https://mfinante.gov.ro/documents/35673/228074/regular_rep_ro_041006.pdf], date consulted: 13 October 2023.

³² Delia Pop-Flanja, "Challenges in International Negotiations: Cultural Background and Context", *Review of the Air Force Academy*, no. 3 (30), Braşov: "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy Publishing House, 2015, p. 177.

³³ European Commission, "2002 Regular Report on Romania's progress towards accession", doc. cit.

usual guidelines for drafting formal reports, although we cannot help but notice that the gravity of some of the facts depicted is in stark contrast to this impersonal, dull manner of writing.

To remain in the sphere of euphemisms, we have observed a certain smoothness of the language of the monitors when producing recommendations. The very nature of the country reports is to sometimes mend severe problems occurring in the 35 *acquis* chapters, so it is expected of them to give more than advice. However, the ratio between “should” and “must” in the documents we have read is about 20:1, which is peculiar, given the decisive impact the documents are meant to have at national level. This proportion changes if “need(s) to” is compared to the use of “must”, yielding a 2:1 ratio. In both cases, we acknowledge that both “should” and (even more so) “need(s) to” are endowed with a mandatory connotation, if so phrased, but the impact thereof is often reduced compared to the more commonly salient “must” and “have/has to”. Compliance with the *acquis* is hardly achieved with breezy recommendations, so stronger formulas are perhaps to be expected from a management authority, especially one as experienced as the EC.

In the older and the newer country reports, there is a tendency to maintain a uniform tone, which for the WB candidates is much graver than for the ECE states. Granted, the latter were much closer to the moment of accession at the time the reports we tackled were issued. While this is quite natural, it is still worth underlining the preoccupation for setting the tone throughout the document, which is a feat of linguistic endurance and consistency. On the other hand, this also turns the narrative “robotic”, as the need to maintain the general outlook and avoid contradictions is paramount, with repetitions being rife in various sections. This barely adds to the creativity or appeal of the texts, but we do acknowledge that neither attribute is particularly relevant in such an endeavour.

On a more interesting note, especially in the latest reports, the authors do not shy away from attempts at scenario-building, or at emitting prospects, such as: “The considerable role played by the Minister of Justice in this process could undermine NAPO's independence”, or “It remains to be seen whether these measures will lead to any noticeable reduction in levels of corruption”.³⁴ In the first example, the use of a conditional leaves room for interpretation, but does instil a certain feeling of gravity, while in the second case, the introductory formula already paints a rather bleak picture of the expectations accruing from the measure described. Both, however, contribute to the idea that the country reports are naturally endowed with a degree of subjectivity, or at least with a margin for error, given the complex array of topics that make up the community *acquis*.

While the contents of the *acquis* have been known for a long time, the reports go beyond the leitmotifs that constitute the core of the observations, to also tackle specific national concerns. In the case of Romania's negotiations, two such matters stood out, which were not encountered in a similar form in any of the other candidate countries' assessments - the emergency ordinance

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

practice³⁵ and the demilitarisation of its police corps.³⁶ By delving into such narrow subjects, the Commission proves its ability to detach from what appears to be a stiff matrix of monitoring, in a welcome feat of versatility. On the other hand, because leitmotifs were mentioned, we have selected two examples thereof, testifying to the fact that indeed, in certain areas, the Commission does apply a mould and apparently wishes to create the feeling that it treats countries with an egalitarian eye. A case in point is the constant preoccupation for outlining the discrepancies between the adoption and enforcement of legislation, which we also acknowledge as a major hurdle throughout the accession process: “Having established most of the legal framework for a market economy, Romania must ensure its sustained implementation”.³⁷ The second example hovers around the preoccupation for giving statistics that can be put together to paint a comparative picture of all countries being monitored, in several policy areas - the backlog of cases and the number of judges appointed to various courts fall into this category.

Overall, the reports do not appear to have rid themselves of the clichés that make up the enlargement jargon. Several of these repetitive phrases are directly connected to the Copenhagen criteria, while others refer to the attempt at creating evaluation scales. Multiple examples have been collected during our investigation, of which the following may be exhibited: “capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union”, “a functioning market economy”, “continues to respect human rights and freedoms” and “generally meeting the commitments”. While the former two formulas are a clear rendering of the narrative adopted by the Copenhagen Council³⁸, the latter two are indicative of the progress attained by countries during the monitoring process, which always makes a point of indicating the evolution compared to the previous year. Apart from such standardised wording, the occasional peculiar formula makes its way into the published version of a country report. For instance, we have selected the phrases “old-style institutions” and “implemented relatively smoothly” to express concern over the inherently subjective, or, at best, ambiguous nature of such expressions, which appear to be incompatible with the sober style the documents normally wish to portray.

If only to return to a previous observation on the evaluation scale the EC has never been able - or perhaps willing - to standardise within its enlargement reports, our assessment thereof has revealed a plethora of phrases that reflect the degree of progress, or the severity of the problems associated with chapters of the *acquis*. A uniform approach to the evaluation of a country’s progress in the case of a chapter, for instance, would instil a welcome degree of objectivity, but the complexity of the pre-accession files is perhaps not entirely compatible with a grading scale. On the other hand, we are critical of the loose language the Commission uses in this respect, which makes it unusually difficult to compare the candidate countries’ stance on the

³⁵ Corroborated by: Freedom House, “Nations in Transit 2005, Report on democratisation (electoral process, civil society, independent media, governance) and rule of law (corruption)”, 15 June 2005, [<https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1075362.html>], date consulted: 13 October 2023.

³⁶ Amnesty International, “Bulgaria and Romania. Amnesty International’s Human Rights Concerns in the EU Accession Countries”, 2005, pp. 9-10, [https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/eur020012005_en.pdf], date consulted: 13 October 2023.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ European Council, “European Council in Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993. Conclusions of the Presidency”, 1993, [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21225/72921.pdf>], date consulted: 14 October 2023.

key parts of their enlargement bids. A list of evaluation formulas is presented below, in what could be considered an order, from worst to best, to illustrate the eclectic manner in which the process is conducted: “no progress”, “extremely poor”, “major efforts are required”, [corruption] “remains widespread and systemic”, “limited progress”, “progress has been mixed” - this phrase has an oxymoronic aura, “steady progress”, “significant progress”, “good progress”, “a welcome development”, “the positive trend has continued” and “high level of alignment”. This denotes that indeed, there is no single scale used to evaluate progress, albeit such formulas do appear to be handpicked from a list that is finite.

Conclusions

Our research on the candidate country reports from two separate periods and geographic locations has revealed that while there is some improvement in the clarity of the documents, this is hardly indicative of a new style of monitoring and chiefly stems from the cluster-based approach to the files of the current EU candidates. The EC, as the manager of the complex enlargement policy, benefits from both the tools and the experience to draft comprehensive annual reports, resulting from interactions with decision-makers, civil society and business stakeholders in the countries scrutinised. It also aims to diminish the democratic deficit accusations that are thrown at the EU on so many occasions³⁹, with a policy as sensitive and as financially meaningful as enlargement standing no chance of being spared. This is why the annual country reports contain data that can be useful to scientists and regular readers alike, depending on the thoroughness of the analysis. In fact, the newer texts are easier to read and have lately included visual aids, in the form of bolded phrases, keywords in italics and even abstracts, in an apparent attempt to facilitate the understanding thereof by citizens, the media etc.

With regard to the type of language used, the predominance of plain-old Brussels English is unquestionable, with an overdose of strategic ambiguity occurring in the evaluation grid and in the debatable rendering of some sources of information - to name just two instances. Thus, some recommendations that have partly been given above to improve the usefulness and readability of the reports include: making better use of the source data and metadata that the main facts derive from, with Eurostat becoming a household word throughout the texts; cutting back on the use of the passive voice when a clear, subject-based, structure is the more professional approach; drawing a thicker line between recommendations and mandatory, red-line-like actions that are prompted, with the help of suggestive modal verbs and imperative expressions; avoiding turns of phrase that may be associated with bias or ambiguity, especially where a clear evaluation can be performed; and not least, also in the field of evaluation, opting for a less ramified scale through which progress or regress can be assessed, communicated and compared, both with previous reports on the same country, and with those on the other candidates. For the WB, much like in the case of Moldova or Ukraine, as newcomers to the pre-accession process, this would prove to be scientifically sound, pragmatically encouraging and undoubtedly fairer than the endless supply of sinuous formulas currently used for as important a topic as evaluation.

³⁹ See Jan-Werner Müller, “The EU’s Democratic Deficit and the Public Sphere”, *Current History*, vol. 115, no. 779, March 2016, pp. 83-88, [<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48614146>], date consulted: 14 October 2023.

That said, we continue to appreciate the overall professionalism and minutia of the annual pre-accession reports, whose validity is not meant to be questioned by the present research. Moreover, since the newer ones rely on a six-cluster system⁴⁰, the texts do emanate more coherence and seem somewhat less prone to repetitions and linguistic dogmatism. Their readability is also improved, as the plain-text approach is now furthered with captions, tables, charts, abstracts and bolded-up keywords that are clearly identifiable. In terms of figures and, generally, quantitative data, the current reports are also more accurate and less mass-media-like. Also, with the progress of the EU as a major promoter of gender equality and political correctness, a series of finely-tuned adjustments have been made in the more recent documents, such as the use of the denomination “Ombudsperson”, replacing the more stereotypical “Ombudsman”. Comparisons among the reports are also more accessible and productive, through standardised keywords and phrases, though in this case, a more uniform design of the texts would be of use at least to researchers.

This study has thoroughly analysed merely 45 reports selected mainly based on temporal criteria, which represents a limitation thereof. In future papers, the methodology used to select relevant topics from within the *acquis*, and to perform linguistic/communication analyses, can be improved for more in-depth sifting of the vocabulary, all the more so given the fact that several new countries will be subjected to pre-accession reports, as EU candidates. Since the enlargement policy, as shown above, is gaining both momentum and prominence, such documents are likely to remain at the forefront of research interests found at the crossroads between EU integration studies and political communication.

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⁴⁰ See Marko Milenković, “Trajectories of differentiated EU integration for the Western Balkans”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Differentiation in the European Union*, London: Routledge, 2022, pp. 551-564, [<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429054136>], date consulted: 14 October 2023.

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Corporate Diplomacy: The Corporate Diplomat and the Importance of Intercultural Communication

Eyal Buvilski

Abstract

Corporate diplomacy is a critical aspect of strategic management that involves the effective engagement of stakeholders in achieving strategic objectives, enhancing legitimacy, and maintaining reputation. This paper provides an overview of the fundamental concepts of corporate diplomacy, defines the role of the corporate diplomat, underscores the significance of intercultural communication, and discusses the importance of human development and training. This paper also presents examples that demonstrate the significance of stakeholder engagement and intercultural understanding.

Keywords: corporate diplomacy, corporate diplomat, intercultural communication, cultural training.

Introduction

Globalization has led to the emergence of multinational corporations (MNCs) as significant actors in international politics. These corporations must navigate a complex landscape of stakeholders, including government bodies, non-governmental organizations, the public, and media. Consequently, securing legitimacy for their business activities and cultivating positive relationships with stakeholders have become formidable challenges in the realm of international business⁴¹. Corporate diplomacy is how organizations conduct themselves to create favorable conditions for their activities in host countries. This concept can be divided into three main areas: relationships with the government and governing authorities, non-governmental organizations, and the local community. The long-term success of multinational corporations as global players depends on their ability to manage relationships with various stakeholders and relevant parties.⁴²

This paper focuses on the significance of corporate diplomacy and the corporate diplomat, particularly in the context of international business. As the global business landscape becomes more interconnected, the ability to effectively navigate intercultural communication becomes increasingly important. This paper examines the concept of corporate diplomacy, its relevance to multinational companies, and the role of corporate diplomats in facilitating effective intercultural

⁴¹ Kirsten Mogensen, "From public relations to corporate public diplomacy", *Public Relations Review*, 43(3), 2017, pp. 605–614.

⁴² Huub Ruel & Luisa Suren, "Introduction to the Volume International Business Diplomacy: A Strategy for Improving MNCs' Performance? A Review of the Concept and New Insights from Five European MNCs", in H. Ruel (ed.), *International Business Diplomacy: How can multinational corporations deal with global changes?* Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2018.

communication. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of these critical topics for the benefit of both academic researchers and practitioners in the business sector.

A corporate diplomat must have the ability to maintain effective communication in diverse cultural settings, with cultural understanding and sensitivity serving as the cornerstone of intercultural communication. This field is multidisciplinary in nature, encompassing the study of how individuals from different cultural backgrounds manage relationships, exchange information, and interpret information.⁴³ This paper underscores the importance of understanding existing theories, such as Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, Schwartz's theory of basic human values and Shenkar and Ronen's cultural compass, as they provide the corporate diplomat with valuable tools for comparing cultures and developing a deeper understanding of stakeholders in the target area.

The preparation of corporate diplomats for their role requires specific training and coaching, similar to that of professional diplomats. Duke states that diplomatic training typically consists of two main components: professional knowledge, skills, and values.⁴⁴ This paper expands on the training of corporate diplomats and proposes specific content for such training; it also reviews different approaches to the training of diplomats for their tasks in a diverse cultural environment.

After clarifying the theoretical background, the paper provides a conceptual definition of the term corporate diplomat as a professional in a corporation or business organization. To illustrate the practical significance of corporate diplomacy, the paper reviews two examples of cases in which international corporations use corporate diplomacy methods to gain legitimacy with various stakeholders. The first case is that of the Coca-Cola Company in India, where it faced opposition from the local community due to environmental concerns, and the second case is that of Intel Company in Vietnam, whose success in establishing a plant in the country was facilitated by a special relationship with government officials and involvement in local education and training systems.

The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of corporate diplomats having a deep understanding of the cultural, political, and economic contexts in which they operate and the need for ongoing training and development to maintain their effectiveness in this role.

What is corporate diplomacy?

The concept of corporate diplomacy has gained prominence only in recent years and refers to the strategic management of a company's external relations with various stakeholders, such as governments, NGOs, competitors, and the public, to create favourable conditions for the

⁴³Wilfreid Bolewski, "Corporate diplomacy as global management", *Diplomacy and Economy*, 4(2), 2018, pp. 107–138.

⁴⁴ Simon Duke, "Diplomatic Training in the European Union", in D. Spence & J. Batora (eds.), *The European Union in International Affairs series* (pp. 403–418). London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

company's activities.⁴⁵ Corporate diplomacy aims to achieve the company's business goals while minimizing conflicts and potential risks.

Working in a different cultural environment has resulted in business companies adopting and adapting tools used in diplomatic practice, as the central functions of diplomacy - negotiation, information, representation, and cooperation - are suitable for the business world.⁴⁶ Companies hire employees based on their suitability for position, education, and professional experience; however, they must also train them to work in an international environment. Test cases showed that business failure could have been prevented or reduced if employees had better knowledge of the target area's norms, including ethics and morals.⁴⁷

To prepare for this, companies have developed a suitable strategy for action in a target country. In some cases, multinational organizations face pressure from stakeholders in the target country to adhere to codes and conventions accepted by international organizations, such as the UN, OECD, or Kimberley Process. Implementing this policy requires managing relationships with external parties and convincing internal players to agree with these rules.⁴⁸ Many stakeholders are involved in corporate diplomacy, including government officials, non-governmental organizations, customers, shareholders and investors, employees, suppliers, competitors, the public, the media, and local communities.⁴⁹

The primary difficulty faced by businesses is responding to external pressures and meeting the expectations of foreign stakeholders to gain legitimacy. One way to handle pressure from external stakeholders in the host country is through socially and politically responsible business practices known as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The literature on political CSR has been promoting corporate diplomacy by highlighting the non-monetary values and various types of public responsibility that corporations undertake. However, there is a lack of satisfactory research on the implications of corporate diplomacy in the context of social responsibility and public diplomacy in the field of corporate and public research.⁵⁰

Definition of corporate diplomacy

There are varying perspectives on the definition of corporate diplomacy (CD). One view is that it is a tool used by management to create favourable business conditions and enhance the legitimacy for corporate activities.⁵¹ Other researchers in the field of public diplomacy define CD

⁴⁵ Alberto Asquer, "What is Corporate Diplomacy? And why does it matter?", *Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 4(3), 2012, pp. 53–63.

⁴⁶ Olaf Jelinski, *International Diplomatic Protocol versus Corporate Protocol*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2017.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Raymond Saner & Lichia Yiu, "Business Diplomacy Competence: A Requirement for Implementing the OECD's Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 9(4), 2014, pp. 311–333.

⁴⁹ Witold J. Henisz, *Corporate Diplomacy: Building Reputations and Relationships with External Stakeholders*, New York: Routledge, 2017.

⁵⁰ Michelle K. Westerman-Behaylo, Kathleen Rehbein & Timothy Fort, "Enhancing the Concept of Corporate Diplomacy: Encompassing Political Corporate Social Responsibility, International Relations, and Peace through Commerce", *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 29(4), 2015.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

as corporate actions aimed at addressing the challenges of international business management and consider corporate diplomats as managers who function effectively in diverse cultural settings. However, other researchers argue that CD encompasses activities that extend beyond business interests and address social and political issues in the host country.⁵² With globalization, multinational corporations are increasingly taking on responsibilities previously handled by governments, such as addressing complex international relations.⁵³

Mogensen defines corporate diplomacy as a concept relevant to the activities in which the corporation is involved and tries to develop a sustainable solution in cooperation with the stakeholders involved.⁵⁴ Another stream of research refers to CD as a public relations effort by multinational companies within their target countries. Therefore, the main concern in CD is building relationships between companies and their stakeholders, negotiations, and dialogue.⁵⁵ Corporate diplomacy is also defined as the public relations efforts of an international corporation to create favourable conditions for business activity and build relationships with those who can influence local policy. For these reasons, CD includes elements in the field of international PR, such as corporate responsibility.⁵⁶

Regarding the common definition of corporate diplomacy, Ingenhoff and Marschlich found in their research that about half of the articles published on CD did not refer to theories, and in the other half, they referred to several theories that form the conceptual basis of CD - institutional theory, stakeholder theory, agency theory, political CSR, and Hofstede's theory on cultural dimensions. Ingenhoff and Marschlich defined CD as follows: "The corporate activities of multinational companies, which are directed at the host country's key stakeholders and aimed at participating in decision-making processes on relevant socio-political issues and building relationships in order to gain corporate legitimacy."⁵⁷

The knowledge areas of Public Relations (PR), Public Diplomacy (PD), and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contribute to the conceptual framework of Corporate Diplomacy (CD). PD provides three key components of the theoretical framework of CD: building relationships in the host country, utilizing soft power, and impacting a country's image through the actions of companies and their products. The image of a country can also be affected by companies operating within it, and vice versa. PR and CD share common objectives such as

⁵² Kirsten Mogensen, "From public relations to corporate public diplomacy", *Public Relations Review*, 43(3), 2017, pp. 605–614.

⁵³ Nicholas Bayne & Stephan Woolcock, "What is Economic Diplomacy?", in N. Bayne & S. Woolcock (eds.), *The New Economic Diplomacy- Decision Making and Negotiation in International Economic Relations*, New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 1-15.

⁵⁴ Kirsten Mogensen, "From public relations to corporate public diplomacy", *Public Relations Review*, 43(3), 2017, pp. 605–614.

⁵⁵ Nir Halevy, Sora Jun & Eileen Y. Chou, "Intergroup Conflict is Our Business: CEOs' Ethical Intergroup Leadership Fuels Stakeholder Support for Corporate Intergroup Responsibility", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2018, pp. 1–18.

⁵⁶ Diana Ingenhoff & Sarah Marschlich, "Corporate diplomacy and political CSR: Similarities, differences and theoretical implications", *Public Relations Review*, 45(2), 2019, pp. 348–371.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

managing reputation, maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders, delivering consistent messages, and engaging with the media.⁵⁸

Regarding PCSR, this influences CD in several aspects related to the fact that the issue is essentially political, moral, or related to decision-making. Business companies become political actors when they contribute to global governance, such as in the regulation of global significance.

Intercultural Communication

Being skilled in intercultural communication is a crucial aspect of a corporate diplomat's duty. Understanding the cultural customs of the host country and the ability to bridge cultural divides is crucial for achieving success in foreign cultural settings.

Globalization of the economy, the widespread availability of air travel, and the proliferation of communication technologies have resulted in more frequent interactions between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. These interactions now extend beyond physical meetings to include virtual ones and the utilization of various digital means of communication and social networks. Digitization is a significant trend in contemporary society, and it is likely to have an increasing impact on young people of our generation. Digital communication, especially between cultures, will play a crucial role in the future.⁵⁹

Intercultural communication is a discipline that encompasses various academic fields, including the study of how individuals from different cultural backgrounds manage relationships, exchange information, and interpret messages with people from other cultural backgrounds. This field involves an analysis of verbal and nonverbal communication, an understanding of cultural norms and values, and differing worldviews. The objective of intercultural communication is to comprehend the impact of culture on communication processes and determine effective communication methods that can overcome cultural differences.

Ronen and Shenkar assert that cultural familiarity is often taken for granted, with the assumption that shared values and practices are universal. However, exposure to other cultures, whether through travel or business, can reveal cultural differences. Cultural awareness is crucial for the success of cross-cultural interactions, and can lead to more effective working relationships, improved communication, and greater understanding.⁶⁰ Culture, with its influential impact on perceptions and daily life, is a significant force that should be acknowledged. The modern communication landscape, facilitated by technology such as the internet and satellites, has expanded access to cultural diversity. Even with a cultural understanding, it remains necessary to identify and bridge cultural differences in communication. Existing tools that allow for comparisons between cultural characteristics can contribute to this process.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Denys Lifintsev & Wanja Wellbrock, "Cross-cultural communication in the digital era", *Estudos Em Comunicacao*, 1(28), 2019, pp. 93–104.

⁶⁰ Simcha Ronen & Oded Shenkar, *Navigating Global Business- A Cultural Compass*, New York: Cambridge University, 2017, pp. 3-25.

Hofstede aimed to demonstrate the influence of cultural factors on management practices and highlight the importance of considering cultural differences for effective organization and management.⁶¹ He conducted a study in the 1970s at IBM to examine how different units within the company behaved in relation to similar units in other parts of the world. He analysed the data from this study and subsequent research, ultimately developing the theory of cultural dimensions, which enables cross-cultural comparisons and identifies cultural gaps. Hofstede's six cultural dimensions are as follows.

- Power distance: the extent to which a society perpetuates disparities in influence and wealth distribution.
- Individualism versus collectivism: This dimension describes the relationship between an individual's interests and the group's interests.
- Uncertainty avoidance: the extent to which a society influences its members to deal with risky and uncertain situations.
- Masculinity vs. femininity: This dimension reflects the extent to which a culture emphasizes stereotypical masculine or feminine values, such as competitiveness, assertiveness, and caring.
- Long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation: This dimension concerns the dominant orientation, either short- or long-term, in a culture.
- Indulgence versus restraint: a dimension that refers to cultures that allow relatively free satisfaction of human desires versus cultures that control the satisfaction of needs through rigid social norms.

Schwartz developed the theory of basic human values and views it as a crucial addition to previous intercultural research methods such as Hofstede's dimension theory. This theory focuses on common values shared across various cultures and identifies ten values, along with the complex relationships between them. It is possible for individuals to act in accordance with conflicting values depending on the situation or context.⁶²

Both Schwartz and Hofstede theories have numerous practical implications in the fields of economics and entrepreneurship, particularly in terms of setting up businesses and devising strategies for operating in diverse cultural settings. These theories underscore the crucial role of culture in the success of entrepreneurial ventures in the international arena. Intercultural difference theories explain why some countries lag in their economic development, despite having similar labour markets, natural resources, and government institutions.

It is commonly believed that an individual's worldview influences how others perceive the world, and that they tend to align with the values and norms of their immediate family and surroundings. Individuals usually adopt the values of the group to which they belong, but within the group, they generally place greater importance on the opinions of their closest circles. When communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, it is essential to learn about the norms and values of the society in which they live and to understand the differences between

⁶¹ Geert Hofstede, "Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context", *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1), 2011.

⁶² Shalom H. Schwartz, "An Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values", *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2012.

cultures. This understanding can serve as a foundation for effective intercultural communication.⁶³

Human Development and Training

Working in an international environment necessitates specialized training and coaching, like in the case of professional diplomats. According to Duke, diplomatic training comprises two primary components: professional knowledge, as well as personal skills and values. The diplomat must possess an academic and professional background that is suitable for the position, and during training, he acquires the relevant professional knowledge pertaining to the organization. In addition, as part of his training, he acquires the necessary personal skills for success in the position and learns the values of the organization he represents.⁶⁴ The same applies to corporate diplomats, who must possess appropriate skills to thrive in a diverse cultural setting and possess excellent intercultural communication abilities. Therefore, the training of both traditional and corporate diplomats should include personal and psychological preparation, utilizing a variety of tools and methods that equip employees with necessary skills.⁶⁵

Bolewski highlights the significance of the psychological component of diplomacy and views diplomacy as a wholly personal initiative that encompasses two primary elements: 1. Functional competence includes communication; comprehension of mental processes, feelings, and needs; respect for other identities; and empathy. 2. The ethical principles of international law include consensus, compromise, reciprocity, cooperation, and solidarity. As a result, diplomats must understand the psychology of different actors and possess a high level of emotional intelligence. Corporate diplomats must embody a global mindset comprising three aspects: 1. Culture is characterized by self-awareness, openness to others, and the selective adoption of external values and practices. 2. Strategy, the ability to integrate global goals with local responses. 3. Multidimensionality is the ability to recognize and navigate various relationships and contexts.⁶⁶

The concept of a 'global mindset' can be defined as "A complex cognitive structure characterized by an openness to and articulation of multiple cultural and strategic realities on both global and local levels, and the cognitive ability to mediate and integrate across the multiplicity".⁶⁷

⁶³ Paul Hanel & Uwe Wolfradt, "The Perception of Family, City, and Country Values Is Often Biased", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 49(5), 2018, pp. 831–850.

⁶⁴ Simon Duke, "Diplomatic Training in the European Union", in D. Spence & J. Batora (eds.), *The European Union in International Affairs series*, pp. 403–418. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

⁶⁵ Wilfreid Bolewski, "Corporate diplomacy as global management", *Diplomacy and Economy*, 4(2), 2018, pp. 107–138.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Orly Levy, Schon Beechler, Sully Taylor & Nakiye A. Boyacigiller, "What we talk about when we talk about 'global mindset': managerial cognition in multinational corporations", *Journal of International Business Studies*, 38, 2007, pp. 231–258.

Bolewski⁶⁸ highlights several areas in which corporate leaders can benefit from learning from diplomatic practices:

- Acquiring mastery in cross-cultural and strategic communication, which includes an understanding of political, social, and cultural contexts;
- Developing the ability to mediate and resolve conflicts in a way diplomatic, governmental, and social systems are managed under conditions of uncertainty.

The alignment of business interests, corporate values, and diplomatic knowledge requires additional competencies from corporate diplomats, like those required for traditional diplomats:

- Diplomatic skills, including knowledge of diplomatic actors, laws, procedures, global thinking, and the ability to analyse;
- Psychological skills such as passion for variety, self-confidence, self-esteem, desire to face challenges, and ability to maintain a prepared mind;
- Intellectual skills, including understanding and knowledge of the business environment, business cultures, and international relations; the ability to analyze information; and advice while understanding the political significance of the results;
- Language skills;
- Social skills and the ability to build trust-based relationships with people from different cultures.

According to Jelinski, a corporate diplomat must be familiar with the local business protocol, exhibit behavioural skills such as empathy, enthusiasm, and discretion, and maintain a high level of ethical awareness to achieve win-win situations. His study suggests that corporate diplomacy operates in a manner like diplomatic protocols. Therefore, training for corporate diplomats should focus on corporate protocols and related aspects. There are similarities between the training trajectories of traditional and corporate diplomats. Specifically, with respect to the development of personal abilities, soft skills, and intercultural competence, training is similar for individuals who must be prepared to operate in a different country and cultural environment.⁶⁹

Levy further emphasizes the importance of cognitive orientation among managers in international corporations, specifically the development of a global mindset. This mindset consists of three components: openness and awareness of diverse cultural spaces; the ability to understand cultural complexity and dynamic strategies; and the mediation of globally and locally oriented ideas and actions.⁷⁰

Duke noted that there are two approaches to training diplomats. Some countries, such as Germany, France, Italy, and Poland, favour formal training carried out in a classroom setting with colleagues. The rationale for this approach is a preliminary study that includes an organized

⁶⁸ Wilfreid Bolewski, "Corporate diplomacy as global management", *Diplomacy and Economy*, 4(2), 2018, pp. 107–138.

⁶⁹ Olaf Jelinski, *International Diplomatic Protocol versus Corporate Protocol*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2017.

⁷⁰ Orly Levy, Schon Beechler, Sully Taylor & Nakiye A. Boyacigiller, "What we talk about when we talk about 'global mindset': managerial cognition in multinational corporations", *Journal of International Business Studies*, 38, 2007, pp. 231–258.

curriculum taught by excellent professionals, followed by a practical internship during diplomatic missions.

Conversely, other nations, such as England and Denmark, place stronger emphasis on on-the-job training with experienced mentors. The rationale is that diplomacy is a profession that requires the acquisition of personal skills, and the most effective way to acquire these skills is through close collaboration with experienced diplomats who are dedicated to training and are eager to pass on their knowledge to the next generation. This approach has been combined with other methods in several countries.⁷¹ A working paper examining American diplomacy in the 21st century⁷² highlights the situation in India and China, where extensive training is provided upon entry into diplomatic services and at various stations throughout one's career, in contrast to the United States, where on-the-job training is the primary approach. The report identified three key areas of training for diplomats: management and leadership, policy and strategy matters, and personal diplomatic skills, including negotiation management.

Regarding the development of personal abilities and intercultural skills, training for working overseas and in diverse cultural settings is comparable for both traditional diplomats serving a country's foreign service and corporate diplomats serving a business organization.

The Corporate Diplomat

From the definition of corporate diplomacy⁷³, it is possible to derive a conceptual definition of the corporate diplomat. The corporate diplomat is responsible for developing and implementing the organization's strategy, managing relationships with various stakeholders, and leading the organization to achieve its goals. Given the skills and abilities required for successful corporate managers, I propose the following definition for the corporate diplomat- The corporate diplomat is an individual in a company that plays a strategic role in managing relationships with external stakeholders. The corporate diplomat represents the interests and values of the corporation to various external stakeholders, with the aim of fostering relationships, resolving conflicts, promoting its organizational purpose and reputation, and obtaining legitimacy for its actions.

Examples for Corporate Diplomacy

This section presents two examples of corporate diplomacy to illustrate the strategic significance and importance of this concept in creating legitimacy for a corporation's activities in foreign countries and cultures. As Chaklader and Gautmam have noted, there has been growing recognition in recent decades regarding the relevance of CSR in linking environmental issues to

⁷¹ Simon Duke, "Diplomatic Training in the European Union", in D. Spence & J. Batora (eds.), *The European Union in International Affairs series*, pp. 403–418. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

⁷² Nicholas Burns, Marc Grossman & Macie Ries, *A U.S. Diplomatic Service for the 21st Century*, 2020.

⁷³ Diana Ingenhoff & Sarah Marschlich, "Corporate diplomacy and political CSR: Similarities, differences and theoretical implications", *Public Relations Review*, 45(2), 2019, pp. 348–371.

business strategy.⁷⁴ The need for corporate diplomacy strategies has been heightened by cases in which business failures have been attributed to the improper handling of environmental and intercultural communication issues. Initially, the concept of CSR mainly focused on the ethical and moral behaviour of corporations but has since expanded to encompass social and environmental issues, which are now considered integral to business strategy and a key source of business opportunities.⁷⁵ By improving relationships and cooperation with stakeholders, CSR can enhance a corporation's ability to improve its financial results.

1. *Coca-Cola in India*

In 1999, the Coca-Cola company decided to establish a factory in Kaldera, Rajasthan, an area marked by a lack of water and a focus on developing industrial activity to replace traditional sources of livelihood, primarily agriculture and the leather industry. The government welcomed investors to transform the backward rural area into a modern industrial area, and Coca-Cola took advantage of this opportunity.

However, opposition from farmers and social activists soon arose, claiming that the establishment of the factory had led to a significant drop in the water level and a resulting water shortage. The demands of the protestors were straightforward: the closure of the factory.

The Guardian⁷⁶ reported that Coca-Cola's large manufacturing plant in India has been accused of causing significant economic harm to local farmers by depleting their water sources and contaminating soil. The plant's significant water consumption is alleged to have led to a decline in the local economy, resulting in local authorities ordering its closure. The situation escalated to the point where Coca-Cola was forced to provide water tankers to surrounding villages to maintain a minimum supply. International organizations intervened, presenting evidence of the environmental damage caused by the plant. However, Coca-Cola disputes these claims, arguing that the water shortage was caused by drought and that extensive environmental assessments were conducted prior to the establishment of the plant.

The protest against Coca-Cola factory gained momentum and attracted supporters as it received coverage in the local media. Drew highlighted the moral economy, which prioritizes rural farmers' desire for economic activity that supports the rural lifestyle, as opposed to corporate activities that harm the environment. Moreover, Drew described how social activists tried various approaches to raise public concerns about Coca-Cola's impact on the water system, including writing speeches, slogans, and protest songs. Social movements employed different methods to bring the public's feelings to the attention of decision makers, and practices were developed in rural areas that exemplify the moral economy. When the protest gained traction,

⁷⁴ Barnali Chaklader & Neeran Gautam, "Efficient Water Management through Public-Private Partnership Model: An Experiment in CSR by Coca-Cola India", *Vikalpa*, 38(4), 2013, pp. 97-104.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Paul Brown, "Coca-Cola in India accused of leaving farms parched and land poisoned", *The Guardian*, 2003.

the authorities increased enforcement of the Coca-Cola factory, leading to a halt in production until the situation was resolved.⁷⁷

Coca-Cola's strategic decision to construct a sustainable and stable plan for the plant involved adopting CSR measures, which led to the implementation of a comprehensive plan that addressed the concerns of various stakeholders, including local farmers. Following the outbreak of the protest, Coca-Cola engaged in a dialogue with all parties involved, including the farmers, to promote transparency and build trust. The company's management also verified that the plant was not responsible for the water crisis and found that the claims made against the company were based on perception rather than reality.

To address this issue, Coca-Cola took several steps, including supporting the expansion of drip irrigation, maintaining dialogue with the local community, and deepening its working relationships with local businesses. The company also cooperated with local institutions to enhance transparency in its activities, and invited farmers and local leaders to visit the plant to learn about its water management policy. These efforts have contributed to building trust and promoting community sustainability.⁷⁸

The Coca-Cola Company employed corporate diplomacy practices and effectively communicated across cultures by engaging with local NGOs, government agencies, community leaders, and opinion leaders. The company implemented sustainable water management practices while maintaining transparency in communication and supporting community development projects such as the use of rainwater. Effective cross-cultural communication and collaboration with diverse stakeholders enabled the company to rebuild its reputation and continue business operations in the Indian market.

2. *Intel in Vietnam*

Intel, a prominent American semiconductor manufacturer, invested in Vietnam in the mid-2000s because of its favourable economic conditions, skilled workforce, and strategic location. However, entering the Vietnamese market presents challenges, including cultural differences, regulatory matters, and image and public relations issues.

Athukorala and Tien note that foreign investment played a crucial role in Vietnam's transformation from traditional agriculture to industry. To attract foreign investment, a supportive competitive environment and opportunities for private-sector actors are essential.⁷⁹

In February 2006, Intel announced its intention to establish a semiconductor assembly and testing plant in Ho Chi Minh City, as part of a global expansion plan. The factory was expected to commence commercial activity in early 2011 and employ more than 3,000 workers. The entry

⁷⁷ Georgina Drew, "Coca-Cola and the Moral Economy of Rural Development in India", *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 44(3), 2021, pp. 477–497.

⁷⁸ Barnali Chaklader & Neeran Gautman, "Efficient Water Management through Public-Private Partnership Model: An Experiment in CSR by Coca-Cola India", *Vikalpa*, 38(4), 2013, pp. 97–104.

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Prema-Chandra Athukorala & Tran Quang Tien, "Foreign direct investment in industrial transition: the experience of Vietnam", *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, 17(3), 2012, pp. 446–463.

of a company with the size of Intel was a significant event for Vietnam's economy, which had not previously had a developed technological sector.

Intel commenced its operations and discovered a significant disparity between its objectives and the actual situation. Following the investment of approximately one billion dollars and the commencement of plant operations in July 2010, it became apparent that the workforce would be limited to around 1,000 employees because of low proficiency in both English and professional skills. Prior to this stage, professional training was only provided to local workers at the engineering level, with a small group of engineers receiving advanced technical training. The remainder of the local workforce, mostly women, received minimal technical knowledge and was mainly employed as low-skilled assembly workers.⁸⁰

Intel's management recognized that the success of the plant and substantial financial investment were at risk without the involvement and support of the local community and stakeholders. To address this issue, Intel's management made efforts to promote professional development among its Vietnamese employees, sending students to the United States and Australia for advanced studies and collaborating with local engineering faculties to provide training for professors to teach in Vietnam. Additionally, the company worked with the Vietnamese Ministry of Education to support the implementation of study programs aimed at improving English language proficiency.⁸¹

There were notable discrepancies between the business practices of Intel's foreign managers and local stakeholders, particularly the government and regulatory officials. To overcome these challenges, it is necessary to establish positive relationships with government officials through a proactive outreach. Intel's local workforce played a critical role in facilitating these connections and understanding local bureaucracy and business culture. However, it should be noted that the overall contribution of the factory to the local economy is relatively limited, as many employees are low-level production workers with modest incomes. Although Intel engaged with local suppliers for certain services, it continued to prefer its global partners for the procurement of raw materials and technical equipment.

Intel's activities in Vietnam serve as a testament to its commitment to corporate social responsibility. Factory construction has played an important role in enhancing Vietnam's technological sector and training a new generation of technological professionals. However, one of the challenges is navigating the local culture and mentality and fostering effective intercultural communication. Intel's management team was able to overcome this hurdle by employing local personnel in both leadership and stakeholder engagement roles and by partnering with local authorities on sustainability and environmental responsibility, aligning with the Vietnamese focus on sustainable development. This example illustrates the effectiveness of corporate diplomacy in building trust with local stakeholders and in contributing to the host country's economic and technological advancement.

⁸⁰ Ingeborg Vind, "Transnational Companies as a Source of Skill Upgrading: The Electronics Industry in Ho Chi Minh City", *Geoforum*, 39, 2008, pp. 1480–1493.

⁸¹ Juha Saarinen, "The world's biggest chip shop", *CRN Magazine*, 2012, [<https://www.crn.com.au/news/the-worlds-biggest-chip-shop-301897/>], accessed on 18.10.2023.

Conclusions

As the global landscape continues to evolve, corporate diplomacy is becoming an increasingly significant aspect of business operations for companies with an international presence. Obtaining legitimacy for the corporation's actions in the target country is becoming a central part of business strategy. This requires a high level of strategic understanding, cultural awareness, and personal skills. The corporate diplomat plays a crucial role in the success of the organization and requires specialized training, like traditional diplomats. It is imperative that the training of corporate diplomats emphasize a comprehensive understanding of cultural differences, cultural intelligence, and the ability to navigate disparate cultural perspectives. Intercultural communication is an indispensable aspect of corporate diplomacy and must be a fundamental component of preparation for international work. It is imperative to possess a formal tone when working in a global setting, as it demands an understanding and appreciation of different cultures as well as the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. Psychological components and soft skills training are essential aspects of the preparation and formulation of a strategy in a target area. Corporations should provide training to their personnel to develop the necessary intercultural communication skills when dealing with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, whose values and norms may differ. In crafting a corporate diplomacy strategy, stakeholders should be given utmost consideration, and their needs and expectations should be at the forefront of the planning process.

The concept of corporate diplomacy is predominantly acknowledged among global multinational corporations; however, its recognition among companies and organizations operating outside their country of origin is notably insufficient. The significance of business actors' ability to function effectively in diverse cultural settings has not been sufficiently comprehended by business actors, which leads to a significant portion of business potential remaining unrealized.

Corporate diplomacy is a developing field of study offering ample opportunities for further exploration. It is crucial to advance our understanding of the appropriate application of corporate diplomacy to meet the needs of stakeholders and manage their engagement. There is a need to investigate the impact of a corporate diplomacy strategy on the legitimacy of the corporation and to determine if this varies among distinct stakeholder groups.

To comprehend the potential benefits of implementing a corporate diplomacy strategy, as well as the necessary preparations required for management and work teams, it is important to analyse a range of case studies with varying characteristics, such as geographical locations, cultural differences, and professional fields. The current trend of globalization has necessitated that corporations and companies expand their international activities, and it is crucial for companies to comprehend the business milieu of the region in which they operate. Conversely, it is imperative for local factors in the same region to be aware of the companies that are present there. The application of corporate diplomacy and development of a correlating strategy can lead to substantial benefits for all parties involved in international business interactions.

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Trust Repair in Self-Legitimizing Discourse: A Content Analysis of Crisis Communications in the MH370 Disappearance

Yu Yang and Huabin Wang

Abstract

This paper conducts a content analysis of the self-legitimizing discourse of Malaysian Airlines (MAS) and the Malaysian Establishment (GOV) reflected in their crisis responses in the MH370 disappearance (2014-2018). It describes the specific trust repair strategies and forms of crisis response demonstrated in such discourse before assessing how well MAS and GOV's communication performed against those existing trust repair principles. Implications are discussed for institutions that aim at rebuilding trust in prolonged crises with national and international ramifications.

Keywords: self-legitimation, crisis communication, MH370, trust repair

1. Crisis communication as imperative self-legitimizing discourse

Viewed from a discursive perspective, crisis communication tackles the assessment of institutional/organizational response to a crisis, paying equal attention to how identity, power, and ideology take effect during the communication process. Before discussing this question about institutional response, it makes much sense to examine how institutional and organizational discourses establish legitimacy, i.e. the process of legitimation, under normal circumstances without an issue or crisis.

In fact, legitimation has been a well-studied concept. Parsons⁸² emphasizes that organizations' goals should be in harmony with wider societal values in order to have a legitimate claim on scarce resources. Meyer and Rowan⁸³ highlight the perceptual nature of legitimacy – actions of an entity can be proper or desirable only within socially shared systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. Suchman⁸⁴ echoes with such outside-in approach to legitimacy, defining it as a “generalised perception representing the reactions of the observers to the organisation as they see it; thus, legitimacy is possessed objectively, yet created subjectively”. Van

⁸² Talcott Parsons, *Structure and process in modern societies*, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960.

⁸³ John W. Meyer, Brian Rowan, “Institutionalized organisations: Formal structure a myth and ceremony” in *American Journal of Sociology*, 83, 1977, pp. 340-363.

⁸⁴ Mark C. Suchman, “Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches” in *The Academy of Management Review*, 20, 3, 1995, p. 574.

Leeuwen^{85,86,87} addressed legitimization in discourse by proposing four main categories of legitimization: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis⁸⁸. Reyes⁸⁹ further expands van Leeuwen's concept by adding new discursive strategies and linking them with specific linguistic means of realization that persuade political audiences.

With a literature review on legitimization, one could argue that institutions and organizations maintain power through self-legitimizing discourse and that the process of legitimization, though relational, is not a balanced one, since institutions and organizations tend to play the dominant part thanks to their tremendous access to resources^{90,91}. Indeed, Martín Rojo and van Dijk⁹² describe self-legitimizing discourse in such perspective of power asymmetry: "sociopolitical legitimization [is] accomplished by discourse, which contributes to the reproduction of power by monopolising the truth and by monopolising public discourse". Therefore, to maintain power or hegemony usually does not prescribe the necessity to explicitly justify institutional actions via self-legitimizing discourse, unless "in moments of crisis ... the legitimacy of the state, an institution or an office is at stake"⁹³.

In these unusual moments of crisis communication, discrepancy between public expectations and the perceived performance of institutional regularities enlarges and it creates dissatisfaction and even discontinuing of acceptance and support^{94,95,96}. Thus, it becomes imperative to justify the appropriateness of past or present actions under severe criticism based on a defensible semantics of representation^{97,98,99}.

⁸⁵ Theo van Leeuwen, *The grammar of legitimation*, London: School of Media/London School of Printing, 1996.

⁸⁶ Theo van Leeuwen, "Legitimation in discourse and communication", *Discourse & Communication*, 1, 1, 2007, pp. 91-112.

⁸⁷ Theo van Leeuwen, *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁸⁸ See Note 5 for Theo van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 92.

⁸⁹ Antonio Reyes, "Strategies of legitimization in political discourse: From words to actions", *Discourse & Society*, 22, 6, 2011, pp. 781-807.

⁹⁰ Funsun C. Doskaya, "Legitimizing discourse: An analysis of legitimation strategies in U.S. official discourse on Cyprus", *The Cyprus Review*, 14, 2, 2002, pp. 71-97.

⁹¹ Theo van Dijk, "Discourse as interaction in society", in Teun A. van Dijk (eds.), *Discourse as social interaction*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 1-37.

⁹² Luisa Martín Rojo, Teun A. van Dijk, "There was a problem, and it was solved! Legitimizing the expulsion of "illegal" migrants in Spanish parliamentary discourse", *Discourse & Society*, 8, 4, 1997, p. 531.

⁹³ Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology: A multidisciplinary study*, London: Sage, 1998, p. 258.

⁹⁴ Richard L. Oliver, "A cognitive model for the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction", *Journal of Marketing Research*, 17, 1980, pp. 460-469.

⁹⁵ Richard L. Oliver, "Cognitive, affective, and attribute bases of the satisfaction response", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20, 1993, pp. 418-430.

⁹⁶ Sora Kim, "The process model of corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication: CSR communication and its relationship with consumers' CSR knowledge, trust, and corporate reputation perception", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 154, 4, 2019, pp. 1143-1159.

⁹⁷ See Note 9 for Funsun C. Doskaya, 2002.

⁹⁸ See Note 11 for Luisa Martín Rojo, Teun A. van Dijk, 1997.

⁹⁹ See Note 12 for Teun A. van Dijk, 1998.

2. Trust as key to bridging the unnoticed gap between institutional power and self-legitimizing discourse

Despite their rationale for adopting legitimating discourse to defend and regain power in face of crises, in practice however, organizations that have a defensive rather than accommodative style of crisis communication often fail to lessen the reputational damages and repair stakeholder relationships¹⁰⁰. What is more, these negative outcomes get intensified in societies with increasing perceptions of risk, as people have higher expectations for institutional actors to prevent society from potential harms or uncertainties¹⁰¹. The key problem is, nonetheless, that current institutions and organizations have not yet become accustomed to embracing a fundamentally different role – not just providing something good but preventing the worst from happening¹⁰².

Based on the above discussion, it becomes apparent that self-legitimation discourse is considered hegemonic and one-sided as there is unmet societal need for institutions and organizations to operate their social license with a “cost-reduction” approach^{103,104}. Ultimately, the ideal situation according to sociologist Stahl¹⁰⁵, is that at the core of acquiring power lies collective acceptance, which is the provider of a position to “issue legitimate demands” on people to obey rules. Thus, a relation-oriented concept with implications of control mutuality needs to be introduced to address this issue of power asymmetry.

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman¹⁰⁶ defined trust as the “willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party”, suggesting a dyadic, relational concept involving the trustor and trustee being vulnerable and accommodative to each other. More relevant to this current study on perception and acceptance of power, Mayer et al.¹⁰⁷ identified three characteristics of perceived trustworthiness of the trustee: ability – the “group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain”; benevolence – “the extent to which the organization is believed to do good and show well-meaning attitude to its publics”¹⁰⁸; and integrity – “the trustor believes the trustee will insist on acceptable principles”¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁰ Otto Lerbinger, *The crisis manager: Facing disasters, conflicts, and failures* (2nd ed.), New York: Routledge, 2012.

¹⁰¹ Ulrich Beck, *Risk society: towards a new modernity*, London: Sage Publications, 1992.

¹⁰² Jeroen van der Heijden, *Brief book review – Risk society: Towards a new modernity*, 2019, [https://regulatoryfrontlines.blog/2019/03/04/brief-book-review-risk-society-towards-a-new-modernity], October 2, 2023.

¹⁰³ Jacquie L’Etang, *Public relations: Concepts, practice and critique*, London: Sage, 2007.

¹⁰⁴ Julia Jahansoozi, “Organization–public relationships: An exploration of the Sindre Petroleum Operators Group”, *Public Relations Review*, 33, 4, 2007, pp. 398-406.

¹⁰⁵ Titus Stahl, “Institutional power, collective acceptance, and recognition”, in Heikki Ikäheimo, Arto Laitinen (eds.), *Recognition and Social Ontology*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 349-372.

¹⁰⁶ Roger C. Mayer, James H. Davis, F. David Schoorman, “An integrative model of organizational trust”, *The Academy of Management Review*, 20, 3, 1995, pp. 711-712.

¹⁰⁷ See Note 25, p. 717.

¹⁰⁸ See Note 25, p. 718.

¹⁰⁹ See Note 25, p. 719.

In fact, scholars have provided empirical evidence for the strategic role that trust building plays in interpersonal, inter-organizational, and organization-stakeholder relationships¹¹⁰¹¹¹¹¹². Other scholars, on a step further, have asserted the importance of trust repair at a macro level¹¹³. It thus makes sense to argue that trust is essential, not only because it helps examine the antecedents of acceptance on both the exerting (institutions/organizations) and receiving (publics) sides of power, but because the concept links discourse-oriented research on power with public relations and crisis communication literature¹¹⁴.

3. Case study of crisis communications during the MH370 disappearance: research questions, research method, data collection and coding

The disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 (MH370) happened on 8 March, 2014, when the aircraft was scheduled to fly from Malaysia to China and unfortunately lost contact with the control centre, causing 239 people to death according to the manifest¹¹⁵¹¹⁶. This case has stimulated a heated discussion over the crisis management of Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and the Malaysian Establishment (GOV), including but not limited to the following aspects: 1) the effectiveness of communication especially in terms of stakeholder interests, i.e., victims and their family members; 2) the strategies and forms of response adopted by MAS and GOV to address the rumours and allegations against the company; 3) the political management and performances of GOV partially reflected in the history of patronage politics.

To accomplish the research goals related to the discussions above, the present study is to conduct a content analysis of the self-legitimizing discourse of MAS and GOV reflected in their crisis responses in the MH370 disappearance (2014-2018). It describes the specific trust repair strategies and forms of crisis response demonstrated in such discourse before assessing how well MAS and GOV's communication performed against the existing trust repair principles. The research questions are presented as follows:

RQ1: What types of strategies and forms of response did MAS and GOV adopt to rebuild trust in their self-legitimizing discourse? What were the characteristics of such trust repair in response to the crisis?

¹¹⁰ Denise M. Rousseau, Sim B. Sitkin, Ronald S. Burt, Colin Camerer, "Not so different after all: A cross-discipline view of trust", *Academy of Management Review*, 23, 1998, pp. 393-404.

¹¹¹ Reinhard Bachmann, Andrew C. Inkpen, "Understanding institutional-based trust building processes in inter-organizational relationships", *Organization Studies*, 32, 2, 2011, pp. 281-301.

¹¹² Robert M. Morgan, Shelby D. Hunt, "The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, 58, 1994, pp. 20-38.

¹¹³ Kurt T. Dirks, Roy J. Lewicki, Akbar Zaheer, "Repairing relationships within and between organizations: Building a conceptual foundation", *Academy of Management Review*, 34, 1, 2009, pp. 68-84.

¹¹⁴ Yi-Hui Christine Huang, Song Ao, Yuanhang Lu, Chingyin Ip, Lang Kao, "How trust and dialogue shape political participation in mainland China", *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 11, 5, 2017, pp. 395-414.

¹¹⁵ Huabin Wang, Yu Yang, "The rhetorical paradigm, language use, and power control in crisis communication: A case study of the MH370 disappearance", *Proceedings of International Conference on Crisis Communication and Conflict Resolution (CCCCR) 2022*, 2022, pp. 33-46.

¹¹⁶ Huabin Wang, *A critical public relations approach to crisis communication and management: A case study of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 disappearance*, Singapore: Springer, 2022.

RQ2: How well did the trust build strategies and forms of crisis perform meet the criteria put forward by existing trust repair and crisis management theories?

It is not enough, however, to evaluate trust repair by a single index about ability, benevolence, and integrity¹¹⁷. It is better to be presented in a range of dimensions¹¹⁸. Evaluating trust repair in crisis asks for ways of measuring trust repair discourse of MAS and GOV. To achieve this objective, the current study chooses content analysis¹¹⁹, which asks for a coding scheme consisting of categories to discern whether MAS and GOV's crisis responses serve to repair their trustworthiness.

Bachmann et al.'s¹²⁰ research summarizing existing trust building and repair literature helped the present research gather ideas of specifying the scheme. These are transparency, emotion, inclusion, and response manner, or forms of crisis response (with three sub-categories, i.e., timely, consistent, and active response). Transparency is defined as "openness of ... information disclosure including both good and bad"¹²¹; emotion refers to the willingness to resolve the negative emotions caused by the trust violation^{122,123}; inclusion means enabling stakeholder participation in the decision-making process such as in deciding the compensations and preventing future trust violations¹²⁴; That form of response points out "how crisis messages are presented"¹²⁵, with timely response being in time to fill the information vacancy from audience, consistent response being congruence with values implied by its actions and other materials of its own; and active response being proactivity to generate confidence from its audience¹²⁶.

As for data collection, all the crisis response statements issued by MAS and GOV during the MH370 disappearance (2014-2018) were collected, coded and then analysed qualitatively, with 45 statements from MAS and another 46 from GOV respectively. First of all, two coders were trained to code the content of the press releases. Twenty pieces (about 20% of the entire sample) were coded as a pretest of inter-coder reliability. The results then showed sufficient inter-coder reliability between the two coders: Four of the variables, i.e., transparency, emotion, timely response, and consistent response reached Krippendorff's alpha of 0.70–1.00, with an average of

¹¹⁷ See Note 33.

¹¹⁸ Jack Citrin, Christopher Muste, "Trust in government", in John P. Robinson, Phillip R. Shaver, Lawrence S. Wrightsman (eds.), *Measures of Political Attitudes*, San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1999, pp. 465-532.

¹¹⁹ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004.

¹²⁰ Reinhard Bachmann, Nicole Gillespie, Richard Priem, "Repairing trust in organizations and institutions: Toward a conceptual framework", *Organization Studies*, 36, 9, 2015, pp. 1123–1142.

¹²¹ Sora Kim, S., Mary Ann T. Ferguson, "Dimensions of effective CSR communication based on public expectation", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 24, 6, 2016, p. 557.

¹²² Ken-ichi Ohbuchi, Masuyo Kameda, Nariyuki Agarie, "Apology as aggression control: Its role in mediating appraisal of and response to harm", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, 1989, pp. 219–227.

¹²³ Sejin Park, Lindsey M. Bier, Michael J. Palenchar, "Framing a mystery: Information subsidies and media coverage of Malaysia Airlines flight 370", *Public Relations Review*, 42, 4, 2016, pp. 655–664.

¹²⁴ John Child, Suzana S.B. Rodrigues, "Repairing the breach of trust in corporate governance", *Corporate Governance*, 12, 2, 2004, pp. 143–152.

¹²⁵ Yi-Hui Huang, "Trust and relational commitment in corporate crises: The effects of crisis communicative strategy and form of crisis response", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 20, 3, 2008, p. 313.

¹²⁶ See Note 44.

0.85. The inter-coder reliability of the remaining two variables, i.e., inclusion and active response, did not reach a Krippendorff's alpha value of 0.70, but both had an agreement rate of 87.5 %. See Table 1 for the entire coding scheme.

Table 1 Coding Scheme for the Content Analysis of Trust Repair Strategies and Forms of Crisis Responses

Variable	Variable Details	Options/Range of Answers
Coder	Coder No.	1/2
Time	Year, month, and date for the issue of media statement	Month/Date/Year
Statement No.	No. of the statement	1-93
Period	Time period to which the crisis response statement belonged	1-4
Institutional actor	The source of the media statement	1 = "MAS", Malaysian Airlines 2 = "GOV", Institutions in the Malaysian establishment
Trust repair strategies and forms of response		
Identify all types of trust rebuilding characteristics represented discursively in the statement. Can code more than one type in one statement.		
Transparency strategy	The institution/organization provides and addresses factual information, both good (new findings) and bad (conspiracy theories) to hold itself accountable.	1 = Yes 0 = No
Emotion strategy	The institution/organization soothes the stakeholders' negative emotions such as pain, fear, and anger that sabotage trust.	1 = Yes 0 = No
Inclusion strategy	The institution/organization enables stakeholder participation in the decision-making process such as deciding the compensations and preventing future trust violations.	1 = Yes 0 = No
Timely response	This piece of information given by the institution/organization is in time to fill the information vacancy from its audience.	1 = Yes 0 = No
Consistent response	This piece of information given by the institution/organization is coherent with values implied by its actions and other materials of its own.	1 = Yes 0 = No
Active response	This piece of information given by the institution/organization is proactive and strategic enough to generate confidence from its audience.	1 = Yes 0 = No

4. Research findings of content analysis: trust repair strategies, forms of crisis response, differences in four periods of self-legitimizing discourse

4.1 An overview

Among the three trust repair message strategies, transparency was adopted as the main response strategy (91.1% for MAS and 89.6% for GOV), suggesting that MH370 crisis communicators from both the airline and government tended to rebuild trust by focusing on providing factual information – both favorable and less cheerful – to hold themselves accountable to external stakeholders. Neither MAS nor GOV adopted inclusion in their trust repair discourse (only 24.4% for MAS and 12.5% for GOV), indicating the lack of consideration about stakeholder participation in deciding ways of compensations and change of policies to prevent future trust violations. In fact, media reports disparaged such lack of inclusion in the ruling elites in Malaysia by contrasting personal vignettes of the next of kin and emphasizing how the MH370 disappearance affected the ordinary, marginal families¹²⁷. Additionally, MAS and GOV differed in terms of emotion in their respective trust reconstructions. While MAS took a relatively more accommodative approach, with around half (51.1%) the response mentioning and attending to negative emotions felt by passenger families, GOV did not seem willing to soothe those emotions,

¹²⁷ See Note 42.

with only 18.8% of their crisis response displaying such attentiveness to feelings in an explicit manner. Indeed, result of a Chi-Square Test of Association showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the use of strategy of emotion between the two institutions ($\chi^2(1) = 10.78$, $p < .01$).

4.2 Forms of crisis response: congruence in consistent and timely response, but divergence in active response

There were also interesting findings about forms of crisis response (See Table 2). Both MAS and GOV showed a very high level of consistency in their statements (95.6% for MAS and 95.8% for GOV), but neither did well in giving out timely response (22.2% for MAS and 22.9% for GOV). But such congruence in the forms of crisis response between the two institutions did not hold in the level of activeness which appeared in their responses – 51.1% of MAS's press release demonstrated some level of active response while only 29.2% of GOV's were considered active, meaning that Malaysia, especially the governmental statements, failed to offer messages proactive and strategic enough to regenerate confidence in its trust repair discourse. Indeed, result of a Chi-Square Test of Association showed that there was a statistically significant difference in active response between MAS and GOV ($\chi^2(1) = 4.67$, $p < .05$). It shows that MAS, as a service providing company in nature, did tend to be more active in responding to stakeholder concerns to a greater extent than GOV.

Table 2 Trust repair strategies and forms of crisis response (quantity and percentage)

	MAS (N = 45)				GOV (N = 48)			
	Transparency	Emotion	Inclusion		Transparency	Emotion	Inclusion	
Strategies Subtotal (Percentage in All Statements)	41(91.1)	23(51.1)	11(24.4)	Forms Subtotal (Percentage in All Statements)	43(89.6)	9(18.8)	6(12.5)	Forms Subtotal (Percentage in All Statements)
Timely Response (Percentage in One Particular Strategy)	9(22.0)	4(17.4)	1(10.0)	10(22.2)	9(20.9)	0(0.0)	2(33.3)	11(22.9)
Consistent Response (Percentage in One Particular Strategy)	40(97.6)	22(95.7)	11(100.0)	43(95.6)	43(100.0)	9(100.0)	6(100.0)	46(95.8)
Active Response (Percentage in One Particular Strategy)	21(51.2)	12(52.2)	7(63.6)	23(51.1)	12(27.9)	4(44.4)	4(66.7)	14(29.2)

* % shown in blanket

4.3 Use of trust repair strategies and forms of response: Significant yet trivial associations

In order to discover associations between forms of crisis response and response strategies, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted, which revealed significant correlations between these two aspects (See Table 3).

Table 3 Correlation Matrix including institutional actors, trust repair strategies, and forms of crisis response

	Institutional Actor	Transparency Strategy	Emotion Strategy	Inclusion Strategy	Timely Response	Consistent Response	Active Response
Institutional Actor (1 = MAS, 2 = GOV)	1						
Transparency Strategy	-.026	1					
Emotion Strategy	-.340**	.161	1				
Inclusion Strategy	-.154	.061	.067	1			
Timely Response	.008	-.084	-.175	-.056	1		
Consistent Response	.007	.468**	.042	.100	-.139	1	
Active Response	-.224*	-.031	.151	.241*	.086	-.044	1

N = 93

*: Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Consistent crisis response (MAS and GOV) was positively related to transparency conveyed in their press releases ($r = .47, p < .001$). This positive association between transparency and consistent response suggests that if the self-legitimizing discourse of the institution handling a crisis focuses on providing factual information – both favorable and less cheerful – to hold itself accountable, it is likely for the institution to present that information in a congruent manner throughout the discourse. And vice versa, the more consistent the crisis response throughout the self-legitimation, the more likely it is for the trust repairing institution to disclose crisis-related information in a more genuine manner. Though MAS and GOV generally did well in providing honest information updates to external publics in a consistent manner, such updates were filled with tough denial against possible rumors and consistency came mainly from the sense of authority in a defensive position. Such honesty and consistency thus seemed hegemonic due to the lack of strategies (i.e., emotion and inclusion focusing on the stakeholder side) plus the failure to provide timely response.

Active crisis response was positively related to inclusion conveyed in their press releases ($r = .24, p < .05$). This association between active response and inclusion strategy suggests that if the self-legitimizing discourse of the institution handling a crisis focuses on allowing stakeholder participation in the decision-making process such as deciding the compensations and preventing future trust violations, it is likely to adopt a proactive tone that at least reflects its attention to stakeholders' problems in their trust repair discourse. As the response increases its proactivity

and vigour, chances are higher to convey a sense of stakeholder empowerment by considering their needs and wants in decision making on compensations. Despite this optimistic correlation between inclusion and active response, it does not necessarily indicate any good performance in these two aspects for MAS or GOV, for statements by them scored low in quantities of inclusion (17 out of 93 pieces) and active response (37 out of 93 pieces).

4.4 Four periods of self-legitimizing discourse: delayed inclusiveness

From the result of one-way ANOVA analysis, there was significant difference in adopting inclusion strategy ($F(3,89) = 3.22, p < .05$) among different phases of crisis communication for Malaysia. Post hoc analyses using the Games-Powell post hoc criterion for significance showed that the two Malaysian institutional actors adopted inclusion strategy the most in Phase 2 (maintaining crisis containment) ($M = 0.28, SD = 0.45$), and second in Phase 1 (immediate response) ($M = 0.05, SD = 0.23$), while did not used it once in Phase 3 (measure breakthrough) or Phase 4 (refine conclusions). This is an interesting finding that implies a key reason why Malaysia's communication failed to rebuild trust in the later phases of this prolonged crisis: the second phase, starting from the late July 2015 and led by GOV, did not allow any mentions about stakeholder participation in its decision-making process to decide the compensations and preventing future trust violations when they should have. Through a crisis management standpoint, organizations need to repair trust by adopting an inclusive approach in the wrap up phrase as so to ensure stakeholder confidence in preventing future trust violations¹²⁸. Instead, neither MAS nor GOV paid attention to this aspect in their crisis response. In addition, there was no significant difference in forms of crisis response among the four phrases of crisis.

5. Summary and conclusion

It is concluded that both Malaysian Airlines and the Malaysian Establishment's self-legitimizing discourse to regain institutional power drove the presentation and dissemination of their crisis responses to the MH370 crisis, but neither entity did well in producing substantial trust repair messages, as can be reflected in the strategies and response manners of the statements throughout the crisis.

The institutions did reveal tendencies to rebuild trust from external stakeholders by incorporating trust repair strategies such as transparency (arguing for the authority for information updates) and inclusion (continuously stressing abundant financial helps available to the affected stakeholders), but such defensive positions and the low score in emotion (i.e., pinpointing and executing emotional support to the fearful, distressed, and angry families) led to the failure to repair trust in a professional way that could lead to collective acceptance of institutional power. Once the leading role of crisis communications was taken over by the relevant agencies of GOV from Phase 2 – maintaining pseudo-containment of the crisis in a prolonged process, such hegemonic mindset of power without building trust from stakeholders even increased due to GOV's unsympathetic, unadaptable, and inactive response in face of

¹²⁸ See Note 39.

threats to their reputation in stakeholders' mind. In fact, as Ufen¹²⁹ mentioned, "Malaysia has been conceived of as 'semi-democracy'" and critically situated "somewhere in the grey zone between democracy and 'full' authoritarianism". Under this context, self-legitimation and image repair in crisis thus tend to neglect trust repair as an unnoticed link between power and acceptance¹³⁰¹³¹.

Meanwhile, for MAS, the crisis messages concerning its professional appeal did not get across to key publics, constituting a worse scenario for reputation management, and even affecting the long-time survival of the institution¹³². Indeed, the operational environment of the corporate sector in Malaysia may account for the situation. Enjoying a dominant presence in the market, the practice of government patronage would lead to a favour of politically connected corporations¹³³ and play a crucial role in identifying their business nature¹³⁴. For MAS, the privatization does not necessarily imply an optimistic progress because of the indirect control by the government such as the appointment and major decisions¹³⁵.

In sum, the content analysis of the self-legitimizing discourse of Malaysian Airlines (MAS) and the Malaysian Establishment (GOV) during the disappearance contributes to legitimation research by its conversation with trust repair in crisis communication literature. It tried to answer the questions raised by Bachmann, Gillespie, and Priem¹³⁶ about the interplay among trust repair mechanisms and the role of power in organizational and institutional trust repair. In general, the questions need to be answered by analysing the crisis communication practices of institutions and/or organizations with hegemony, such as MAS and GOV, as they not only give crisis communication researchers adequate response statements as resources, but also epitomize political and economic power in Malaysia. For trust repair mechanisms to function ideally, trust repair strategies – i.e., transparency, emotion, and inclusion, need to be buffed with appropriate forms of response to crisis – i.e., timely, consistent, and active responses¹³⁷. But this practical-level interplay needs to be directed by an overarching understanding of trust as the bridge between institutional power and acceptance, as indicated by the failure of MAS and GOV's self-legitimizing discourse during the MH370 crisis. These suggestions are applicable also to crisis communicators serving organizations with strong ties with the government, but a necessary step toward negotiating autonomy versus over-reliance on state support in normal times might help boost the level of professionalism in crisis management.

¹²⁹ Andreas Ufen, "The transformation of political party opposition in Malaysia and its implications for the electoral authoritarian regime", *Democratization*, 16, 3, 2009, p. 604.

¹³⁰ See Note 22.

¹³¹ See Note 23.

¹³² Zahed Ghaderi, Ahmad Puad Mat Som, Jia Wang, "Organizational learning in tourism crisis management: An experience from Malaysia", *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 31, 5, 2014, pp. 627-648.

¹³³ Ferdinand A. Gul, "Auditors' response to political connections and cronyism in Malaysia", *Journal of Accounting Research*, 44, 5, 2006, pp. 931-963.

¹³⁴ Vighneswaran Vithiatharan, Edmund Terence Gomez, "Politics, economic crises and corporate governance reforms: Regulatory capture in Malaysia", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 44, 4, 2014, pp. 599-615.

¹³⁵ See Note 35.

¹³⁶ See Note 39.

¹³⁷ See Note 44.

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Identity- Based Mediation in Intractable Conflicts. The Case of EU as Mediator in the Belgrade- Pristina Dialogue

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of issues of competition and coordination of multiple mediation missions on resolving intractable conflicts. It explores the example of EU's mediation efforts in the Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, a conflict with a lengthy and complicated history of trauma and loss, which attracted over time many facilitators as well as spoilers and which records a continuous increase in the number of actors involved in the mediation environment. The EU conflict resolution success will depend on the EU's capacity to regain the trust of the Serbian people in the European institutions, objectives, and reasons. With the latest threats of an Internet-connected world, the Serbian-Kosovo conflict has become an ideological struggle with perception management as its most prominent feature.

Keywords: intractable conflict mediation, EU's mediation mission, modern international mediation

Introduction

The identity of the mediator has a significant impact on the entire mediation process. The role of mediator can be fulfilled by a wide range of actors, from independent individuals to government officials, states, international, regional, or non-governmental organisations, religious figures, and so on. Each of them brings to the conflict situation their own cultural baggage, perceptions, principles, and interests that will influence the mediation process, the strategies used and the behaviour of the mediators.

Based on the tasking by the Political and Security Committee of 31 July 2009, the EU started coordinated and focused efforts of strengthening EU's mediation capacity. The EU defines "mediation, facilitation and dialogue as distinct but closely related and complementary tools for dealing with conflicts and crises".¹³⁸ According to this Concept "mediation is usually based on a formal mandate from the parties to a conflict, and the mediator gets involved both in the process

¹³⁸ The Council of the European Union, Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities, 2009 [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/cfsp/conflict_prevention/docs/concept_strengthening_eu_med_en.pdf], accessed on 07 January 2023, p. 3.

and substance of the negotiations by making suggestions and proposals. Facilitation is similar to mediation, but less directive, and less involved in shaping the substance of the negotiations".¹³⁹

But the EU is only one of the actors involved in influencing the relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The ongoing EU mediation efforts are built on the basis of previous efforts, with which the current mission must coordinate, and, at the same time, it must cope and compete with other actors involved such as Russia and China. In this complex mediation context, the parties have even developed methods to search the most favourable of the proposals of the conciliators with polar opposites political cultures.

EU as an Actor in International Mediation

A study undertaken within the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University in Sweden in 2009, containing information on the exact identity of third parties, classified third parties into seven categories: the UN, non-UN Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), regional organizations, neighbouring states, major powers (permanent members of the UN Security Council, P5), prominent individuals, and other actors, i.e. all third parties that were not included in the aforementioned categories. "In the period between 1990-1998, the great powers, the P5, took part in more than a third of all crises. The great powers were also the most active actors, reporting more than a third of the measures taken. Not surprisingly, France, Great Britain, Russia and the USA were the most active in Europe. The US acted in Northern Ireland and the Balkans. Russia was involved in the crises in the Balkans as well as in the countries of the former Soviet Union. (...) All major powers, with the exception of China, have been involved in conflict prevention measures. China was absent from the area of international conflict prevention during this period. (...) In Africa, The Organisation of African Unity was the most active organization".¹⁴⁰ However, as it has become a more powerful international actor, China (along with other BRICS states) has demonstrated growing assertiveness in remodelling norms around international conflict prevention, resolution, and reconstruction. In the case of Libya, we have witnessed the division between the states of the international community -, i.e., pro-interventionist Global North and pro-sovereignty Global South on the norm of the Responsibility to Protect - taking its most powerful form. Since then, the dichotomies resulted from previous UN / NATO humanitarian intervention norms which were often perceived as neither legal nor morally justifiable by the BRICS bloc deepened with the Western liberal states appearing to be trying to impose their own values and interests on weaker states. The case of Serbia-Kosovo conflict is a perfect example of how such "build-ups" of previous suboptimal, poorly executed, irresponsibly led, civilian targeting military interventions for humanitarian reasons can strongly influence the current diplomatic efforts. The most disastrous and durable consequence of NATO's air campaign in Serbia was the suppression of a promising and democratic movement in Belgrade, which was the last hope of Serbs for a democratic future.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Magnus Öberg, Frida Möller, Peter Wallensteen, "Early Conflict Prevention in Ethnic Crises, 1990-98: A New Dataset", *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, No.1, Vol. 26, 2009, pp. 78-79.

Patrick Regan and Richard W. Frank note the importance of the identity of mediators in the mediation process: “some mediators have greater international value than others (Jimmy Carter or Nelson Mandela for example), and there is both theoretical and empirical evidence to show that the identity and reputation of the mediator or negotiator has an important role in the failure or success of the process. The more internationally visible or the well-seen mediators have a greater degree of persuasion (or pressure) on the opponents in order to compromise. (...) For example, Kenyan President Moi mediated 21 times in five different conflicts, former President Jimmy Carter mediated 12 times, Foreign Minister Lord Owen mediated 11 times in two conflicts. Other notable mediators are UN Special Representative Arnault and Zimbabwean President Mugabe.”¹⁴¹

Evidently, both the reputation of the mediating organization as well as the reputation of the mediator are essential components that foster trust in conflict resolution processes. The professional reputation of the HR for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, who reaffirmed personal engagement as facilitator with the backing of EU Member States in the Serbia-Kosovo normalisation process, is controversial even among other EU diplomats. His reputation has been compromised by his comments about Europe being a “garden” and the rest of the world a “jungle”, or by public statements cantered on gender, colonialism and other emotionally charged public and political debates, and, last but not least, his reputation is marked by his history as one of the most well-known critics of the Catalan independence movement.

However, it is impossible to imagine a future mediator who will not be controversial at this point in today’s culturally, psychologically, socially polarised democratic societies of Europe and elsewhere, with the spiralling forces of modernity acting on all levels.

Ray Block Jr. and David A. Siegel, aligning with the conviction that the mediation process is strongly influenced by the identity of the mediators, propose a theory based on the ‘identity game’ in order to obtain desirable results: “whether or not one believes that Huntington’s (1996) ‘clash of civilizations’ obtains, there is substantial evidence that identity cleavages alter conflict behaviour via increased ease of mobilization”.¹⁴²

In the same vein, Jacob Bercovitch and John Foulkes seem to agree that cultural differences cannot be overlooked when considering the environment of international mediation: “an analysis of all international conflicts between 1945 and 2005 shows that disputes tend to take place largely between parties with some major cultural differences. (...) The conflicts tend to be fought between adversaries from the same region, but still the parties will separate in terms of political systems, level of political freedom, level of civil freedom and religion. These cultural differences have proven to be an important factor in the success of international mediation (...) Culture is certainly a central force in building the reality of conflict in international relations. (...) Cultural constructions tend to favour the emergence of sets of behavioural norms and ways of

¹⁴¹ Patrick M. Regan, Richard W. Frank, Aysegul Aydin, “Diplomatic Interventions and Civil War: A New Dataset”, *Journal of Peace Research*, No.1, Vol. 46, 2009, p. 142.

¹⁴² Ray Block Jr., David A. Siegel, “Identity, Bargaining, and Third-Party Mediation”, *International Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Volume 3, Issue 3, 2011, p. 416.

relating both to the group inside and to the members outside. (...) The parties' perceptions, behavioural norms and internal composition are significantly influenced by culture".¹⁴³

Regarding the issue of neutrality - partiality of third parties, there is no consensus in the field of conflict resolution. From this point of view, scholars are divided into two categories: those who believe that third parties must be impartial in order to achieve success in mediation and those who believe that biased third parties can be effective in the mediation process. The European Union is not perceived as an impartial third party by the Serbian side since Kosovo is currently recognised by the majority of the member states. For this reason, Serbia is a fertile field for the most virulent illiberal forces to come to surface and prompt the Serbia public to choose sides. As the ideological dichotomy deepens, the issue of the partiality of EU as a third party becomes even more paramount, with its success being automatically connected to the success of the liberal order as a whole, in its relations with the illiberal world.

As to the choice of methods, the political mediation strategy that has been used by the EU is a culture-centred, non-coercive strategy employing peaceful diplomatic efforts in the conflict management process. The declaration of Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice President of the European Commission on March 16th, 2023, clearly demonstrates the EU's support for soft mediation, affirming the superiority of soft tools and the need to be used independently to ensure the success of mediation in this case. Combining soft tools with hard elements is not part of EU approach, indicating a clear shift in the interest in coercive strategies that have dominated foreign policy issues in the past: "In 2020, we held several High Level and Chief Negotiator meetings in Brussels focused on negotiating a comprehensive legally binding agreement on normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo dealing with all outstanding issues. (...) There have been ups and downs, and far too often issues considered small and technical proved highly sensitive and political, with the potential of turning violent. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine changed the picture. The Dialogue is not only about Kosovo and Serbia. It must be seen in the current broader geopolitical context, a defining moment in the European history."¹⁴⁴

Although investment and aid by the EU-27 and other players have been lowering Russian investment, the 2021 edition of the Balkan Barometer shows that with regards to the support for the EU membership, "Serbia remains the only economy where the EU accession is supported by less than half of respondents, though the number of respondents who criticise it is three times lower (42% in 2019 and 15% in 2018). Kosovo is once more the EU's biggest cheerleader in the region, with 91% viewing membership as a positive development. On the other hand, nearly 39% of respondents in Serbia are neutral towards the EU accession".¹⁴⁵ This is a particularly complex

¹⁴³ Jacob Bercovitch, Jon Foulkes, "Cross-cultural effects in conflict management: Examining the nature and relationship between culture and international mediation", *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, Volume 12, Issue, 1, 2011, p. 31.

¹⁴⁴ The European External Action Service, *Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Time to take responsibility and move towards the EU*, 16 March 2023, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-time-take-responsibility-and-move-towards-eu_en], accessed on 16 December 2023.

¹⁴⁵ The Balkan Barometer, *Public Opinion Analytical Report, 2021* [Balkan_Barometer_Public_opinion_2021v4_compressed.pdf], accessed on 15 January 2023.

situation due to the fact that EU as an international mediator does not speak with one voice when it comes to the recognition of Kosovo's independence.

In 2009, the same year when the Lisbon Treaty came into force, the European Union adopted its strategic concept on mediation. The following year, the diplomatic service of the European Union, the European External Action Service was established, being formally launched on 1 January 2011 with the purpose of Europe to speak with a single voice when managing the foreign policy of the Union.

In its Advisory Opinion delivered on 22 July 2010, the International Court of Justice concluded that "the declaration of independence of Kosovo adopted on 17 February 2008 did not violate international law".¹⁴⁶ However, five EU member states do not recognise the right of Kosovo to unilaterally adopt a solution for the final status of Kosovo which disregarded the territorial integrity of Serbia: Spain, Slovakia, Greece, Romania and Cyprus.

Issues of Coordination and Competition in Mediating Serbia-Kosovo Conflict

An in-depth analysis provided by the European Parliament Think Tank in 2019 underlines the depth of Serbia's cooperation with the aforementioned external actors: "Russia is a traditional geopolitical ally of Serbia, and in the past Moscow has provided diplomatic support (for example, backing Serbia's position on non-recognition of Kosovo*), investment, and economic and military aid. In return, Serbia resisted EU pressure to apply sanctions on Russia over its aggression in Ukraine. (...) In addition, Serbia is a founding member of the 16+1 initiative between China and the central, eastern and south-eastern European countries launched in 2011, before the Belt and Road Initiative. For China, Serbia represents a crucial transport corridor and energy hub".¹⁴⁷

Resting on earlier efforts, the mediation process led by the EUSR (EUSRs are part of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and mandated by the EU's Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) therefore by member states) was reinstated in 2020.

Wallensteen and Svensson also take note of the fact that "in recent political mediation, there is a plethora of third parties. By contrast, humanitarian mediation efforts seem mostly to be conducted by single mediators without parallel or competing mediation efforts. The political mediation draws the attention and involvement of many actors who work in sequence or in parallel efforts. Different types of mediators can complement one another. In many instances, a variation of styles may be needed. (...) Some mediators may focus on justice and the broader types of peace, while others can focus on the task of getting a more narrow peace in the form of an end to violence".¹⁴⁸ Therefore, we may conclude that the progress of the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia continues to be particularly slow due to the involvement of

¹⁴⁶ The International Court of Justice (ICJ), *Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo*, 2010 [<https://www.icj-cij.org/case/141>], accessed on 18 January 2023.

¹⁴⁷ The European Parliament, European Parliamentary Research Service, *Serbia: Pulled in two directions*, 2019 [[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/642247/EPRS_ATA\(2019\)642247_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/642247/EPRS_ATA(2019)642247_EN.pdf)], accessed on 18 January 2023.

¹⁴⁸ Isak Svensson, Peter Wallensteen, *The Go-Between. Jan Eliasson and The Styles of Mediation*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010, p. 74.

a multitude of actors, some of them even working against mediation and assiduously advising conflicting parties to continue the conflict situation. However, Belgrade-Pristina's scenario is not unique: in the post-Cold War era, we are witnessing an incremental increase in the levels of systemic complexity in the entire global environment.

The globalization of conflict and its current features, especially the prominent cultural and ethnical interconnections, call for the development of new approaches to the international mediation regime. The old dichotomy of superpowers has been replaced by an increasing involvement of external actors in diplomatic efforts to manage conflicts such as mediation and third-party interventions of any kind. Also, mediation styles, strategies and intervention types are equally hard to determine: "the literature traditionally refers, for instance, to 'soft' and 'hard' mediation, to 'power-based' or 'trust-oriented' approaches, or to a set of fixed categories of mediator strategies, such as 'facilitation,' 'formulation,' and 'manipulation / directive strategies.' However, we find these notions too simplistic to describe the nuances of international mediation".¹⁴⁹

As mentioned above, a primary critique of Europe's mediation mission is its incapacity to speak with one voice due to the internal divisions among the EU member states over the recognition of Kosovo's independence. However, the states that do not recognise Kosovo tend to support EU's mediation efforts and keep in line with most decisions of the Council. Therefore, the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) provide the EU with an active and coherent political presence in the region, acting as a "voice" and "face" for the EU and its policies.¹⁵⁰

Last but not least, another "major obstacle that hinders progress in mediation processes is internal tension within the primary parties. Tensions between doves and hawks, moderates and fundamentalists, or competing centres of power can stand in the way of any movement toward peace. Mediators tend to prioritise the relationship between the parties. Yet, there is a lack of focus on intraparty mediation".¹⁵¹

To this end, the EU mediation toolkit should focus more on incorporating this important dimension of conflict resolution in its strategy. To strengthen the intraparty mediation the EU strategy should go beyond facilitating the Parliamentary mediation and dialogue in Serbia by the European Parliament to a more general version that would dive into the broader social fabric of Serbian political culture and collective identity.

Mediation and Perception Management

Different actors of the international relations scene are involved in the relations between Serbia and Kosovo in order to achieve their foreign policy goals. The EU engaged in diplomatic interventions and actions and put itself at the centre of the regional order in the Western Balkans by defending freedom, the rule of law, promoting human rights, aligning the region with EU

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁵⁰ The European External Action Service, *EU Special Representatives* [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-special-representatives_en], accessed on 08 February 2023.

¹⁵¹ Isak Svensson, Peter Wallensteen, *op. cit.*, p.134.

standards. But the EU's diplomatic efforts in Serbia and Kosovo have become a consistent and controversial feature of EU's foreign policy.

The European Union has offered the two parties a vision of a common future and has become a beacon of protecting the liberal democratic values in the region which are currently under attack from powerful illiberal forces. The Serbian-Kosovo conflict has become an ideological struggle, a great contest between democracy and authoritarian challenges.

Meanwhile, the deep forces of modernisation and development, greater knowledge, discovery, innovation, new technology, social media and artificial intelligence are moving our world forward on the one hand and polluting our world by misleading people about specific issues on the other, political propaganda being one of the most important instruments of foreign policy for creating divisions between competing factions and individuals.

As early as 2008, Ernest J. Wilson drew attention to the fact that "the G-8 nations are accelerating their transformation from industrial to post-industrial economies, where power increasingly rests on a nation's capacity to create and manipulate knowledge and information".¹⁵² (...) "Sophisticated nations have everything from smart bombs to smart phones to smart blogs. And as states get smarter, so too do non-state actors like Al Qaeda in their use of the media across multiple platforms. Any actor that aspires to enhance its position on the world stage has to build strategies around these new fundamentals of 'smartness'".¹⁵³ As more of the world comes online via social media, the misinformation and disinformation can have far more serious consequences. As authors Carl T. Bergstrom and Jevin D. West show "social media is also a fertile ground for disinformation, falsehoods that are spread deliberately. (...) While we think of propaganda as designed to convince people of specific untruths, much modern propaganda has a different aim. The 'fire hose strategy' is designed to leave the audience disoriented and despairing of ever being able to separate truth from falsehood. (...) Meanwhile, authoritarian governments have embraced social media. They were originally fearful of this medium and prone to censor its use. But more recently, governments such as those of China, Iran, and Russia have discovered that social media offers an ideal platform on which to monitor public sentiment, track dissent, and surreptitiously manipulate popular opinion".¹⁵⁴

Today, the current global complexity raises new questions for mediation around these new fundamentals of "smartness" and "perception management". The European Union has recognised the need to create a research agenda to redefine the conditions under which the application of certain forms of mediation become operative. Mediation tools and strategies will undoubtedly be interconnected to useful tools from other scientific fields that influence the mediation process. Today, we are talking about highly informationally competent modern international mediators, supported in their actions by institutions and epistemic communities, academic research, which will provide the necessary resources throughout the mediation process.

¹⁵² Ernest J. Wilson III, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616: 110, 2008, p. 111.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

¹⁵⁴ Carl Bergstrom, Jevin West, *Calling Bullshit: The Art of Skepticism in a Data-Driven World*, Dublin: Penguin Books, 2020, pp. 31-32.

A social media analysis conducted for a study requested by the AFET committee released on February 2021, on Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Ways to Effectively Counter Them found that a “suite of nationalist publications (...) played a particularly important role in Serbia. These outlets and individuals are characterised by negative reporting about the EU, NATO and the West in general, while at the same time often fostering pro-Russian discourse. Moreover, there have been allegations of a large number of fake social media profiles, groups and pages that have been used for disinformation purposes. In April 2020, for instance, Twitter deleted 8 558 Twitter accounts from Serbia, with the explanation that they were state-backed fake accounts connected to the main ruling party”.¹⁵⁵ Prominent disinformation campaigns reviewed for this study included “a long-running narrative portraying European values as detrimental to the development of the Serbian state and a number of campaigns aimed at leveraging the ability of Serbian media and other institutions to influence the political agenda in Kosovo, including through disinformation on the course of bilateral negotiations and misrepresentation of the positions of European leaders”.¹⁵⁶

Therefore, in the normalisation process the EU has to deal not only with humans participating in shifting the perceptions of the parties and shaping relations, but also with automated computer programs such as the fake social media profiles mentioned above, also called “bots”, which are designed to act as content generators for the purposes envisaged by the propaganda. Russian misinformation campaigns are designed to undermine perceptions about the EU, to deepen pre-existing ideological divides within Serbia focusing on emotionally charged issues such as gender roles, religion, and post- Yugoslav war “reconciliation”. As a consequence, it becomes increasingly difficult for the Serbian audience to discern truth from falsehood.

The EU conflict resolution success will depend on EU’s capacity to manage perceptions, and to regain the trust of the Serbian people in the European institutions, objectives, and reasons. With the latest threats of an Internet-connected world, mediation remains the most appropriate mechanism for resolving conflicts because its power lies in the fact that the primary purpose of mediation is to change perceptions, and thereby reconfigure the interests and identities of the belligerent parties.

In the actual conflict resolution process between Serbia and Kosovo, the perceptions of the belligerent parties represent the main barriers to agreements. Changing perceptions can be accomplished both by creating norms to regulate identities through complex learning and through normative change, as well as by establishing new identities by changing perceptions about the “Other” acquired through collective knowledge. There are, of course, also other types of barriers, including: (a) tactical or strategic ones, such as masking real interests, distorting reality, the exclusive use of ‘hard’ tactics in the mediation process, or (b) psychological ones, such as attributions and influences regarding the character of others, or the bias of interpreting information, assessing risks and/or setting priorities, but also (c) institutional barriers, such as bureaucracy or political barriers that constrain the leaders. However, it is essential to point out

¹⁵⁵ European Parliament, *Mapping Fake News and Disinformation in the Western Balkans and Identifying Ways to Effectively Counter Them*, 2021, [[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EXPO_STU\(2020\)653621](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EXPO_STU(2020)653621)], accessed on 18 January 2023.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

the fact that we consider the barriers in perceptions to be the most important ones because they can generate other barriers, while the elimination of barriers in perceptions automatically leads to contracting and cancelling the other barriers.

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*Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speeches on the Migration Crisis: How It Challenges the EU**

Yusuf Avar

Abstract

The study attempts to address the subject of how Prime Minister Victor Orbán's speeches, interviews, and actions have made it difficult for the EU to tackle the migration situation. It is argued that Orbán's remarks, interviews, and actions render it more difficult for the EU to make decisions about the migration crisis. 40 Orbán's speeches and interviews have been subjected to critical discourse analysis by using its techniques of conceptual metaphor analysis, use of pronouns, and argumentation analysis. The study showed that Orbán used metaphors to make his ideas clearer and more convincing. It was also determined that Orbán based the country's migration policies on the construction of identity, which is about "we" and "other" (the use of pronouns). Furthermore, by analyzing these speeches and interviews, four discursive arguments have been identified. (1) Orbán has implemented a securitization strategy concerning migration; (2) Orbán has leveraged the presence of immigrants to strengthen and augment his position of power in Hungary; (3) Orbán has taken a more assertive stance on the process of "de-Europeanization" with regards to migration and (4) Orbán has accused the EU that it does not have the policy to deal with the migration crisis and he asserted that their measures against immigration not only safeguard Hungary but also serve to safeguard the EU.

Keywords: Migration Crisis, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Critical Social Constructivism, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

The EU is currently dealing with a rare historical circumstance. The extraordinary problem of member states returning to an authoritarian and illiberal political system confronts the political organization, which was founded with the primary goal of promoting peace and prosperity in Europe after World War II ¹⁵⁷. Hungary is one of the countries that has a propensity towards authoritarian and illiberal logic. Using the majority to strengthen their grip on power and eliminate as many components of checks and balances as they could, the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Magyar Polgári Szövetség-FIDESZ) government established what is usually called an

* This article is a part of the author's ongoing thesis entitled *The EU's Normative Paradox: The Cases of Hungary and Poland*.

¹⁵⁷ Bojan Bugaric, "Protecting Democracy and the Rule of Law in the European Union: The Hungarian Challenge," *Leqs Paper*, no. 79 2014, p. 1.

“illiberal system”¹⁵⁸. In this context, Hungary has been developing in an illiberal direction, away from the Copenhagen criterion or well-established EU rules.

How Orbán’s speeches and interviews on the migration issue affect the EU’s decision-making process is the topic that the study seeks to address. The study uses critical social constructivism to provide a theoretical foundation for the subject. The concept of identity and the distinction between us and others are key concepts in critical social constructivism. Further, the study uses critical discourse analysis to present how Orbán’s discourses challenged the EU. The primary source for critical discourse analysis is derived from the speeches made by the Prime Minister on subjects related to migration, which are accessible on the official website of the Prime Minister’s Office. In this context, 40 speeches and interviews delivered by Orbán between 2013 and the end of 2022 have been addressed, and 4 discursive arguments were identified: (1) Orbán “securitized” the migration issue and portrayed immigrants as a threat to European civilization, culture, religion, and lifestyle. According to Orbán, immigrants increase terror acts, crimes, and violence against women. Furthermore, he linked the migration issue to George Soros’s NGO and claimed that they plan to allow Muslims to invade the country. (2) Orbán used the immigrants to protect and increase its power in Hungary because he portrays them as enemies. (3) Orbán stepped up toward the “de-Europeanization” path of migration. He criticized the EU’s policies and actions towards immigrants; on the other hand, he supported the idea that countries must act by themselves unless the EU has a common policy. Orbán’s actions, including building fences, changing the criminal code, and holding a referendum, challenged the EU to act coherently on migration issues. (4) Orbán blamed the EU and claimed that their anti-immigrant actions did not only save Hungary but, also, they protected the EU.

Critical Social Constructivism

Nicholas Onuf introduced the term “constructivism” to the International Relations (IR) literature in his book *The World of Our Making* (1989) to refer to what he sees as its theoretical core and to emphasize how fundamentally different it is from the IR tradition¹⁵⁹. Constructivism has mostly become known with reference to Wendt¹⁶⁰. The constructivist perspective mainly asserts that: (1) States serve as the fundamental analytical units in the field of international political theory; (2) The primary structures of the state system are intersubjective rather than material in nature; and (3) State identities and interests are largely shaped by these social structures, as opposed to being externally imposed by human nature or domestic politics¹⁶¹.

¹⁵⁸ Beáta Bakó, *Challenges to EU Values in Hungary: How the European Union Misunderstood the Government of Viktor Orbán*, Taylor & Francis, 2022, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests A Sociology of International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 114.

¹⁶⁰ As cited in Bahar Rumelili, “İnşacılık/Konstrüktivizm,” *Küresel Siyasete Giriş: Uluslararası İlişkilerde Kavramlar, Teoriler, Süreçler*, 2014, p. 151.

¹⁶¹ Alexander Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State”, *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2, 1994, p. 385.

Scholars divided constructivism into many different categories¹⁶². However, the study adopts the divisions of conventional constructivism and critical constructivism, and it uses critical constructivism to explain how Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speeches challenge the EU. The idea of constructing identity and meaning in response to the presence of different perspectives forms the basis of critical constructivists' approach to IRs¹⁶³. In the case of Hungary, Orbán has securitized the immigrants. Based on his belief that immigrants are not an extension of their own identity, he claimed that immigrants (particularly Muslims) posed a threat to their religion, culture, and way of life.

While maintaining a focus on language, critical constructivists also incorporate an overtly normative dimension by analysing a researcher's role in maintaining the identities and environments under study¹⁶⁴. Once again, the significance of discourse theoretical approaches is emphasized, but this time with a greater focus on the power and dominance inherent in the language (ibid.). Critical constructivists investigate "how possible" questions¹⁶⁵. They seek to know what constitutes an identity since they think that it is constructed through spoken or written communication between individuals¹⁶⁶. Instead of defining how a naturalized truth affects people, critical theorists want to investigate how people come to believe in a particular version of it¹⁶⁷. The method utilized by critical constructivists in approaching IR is based on the idea that identity and meaning are formed in response to difference. When examining the social structure of international politics, they have emphasized how discourses on universal values such as democracy and human rights are connected to such oppositional structuring¹⁶⁸. According to critical constructivist ideas, actions of differentiation seek to set the identity they are used to represent apart from counter-identities. They assert further that these behaviours are what leads to "performatively created" identities¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶² Reus-Smit "Constructivism," in *Theories of International Relations Third Edition*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 189.: Systematic constructivists, unit-level constructivists, and holistic constructivists; Price and Reus-Smit "Dangerous Liaisons?: Critical International Theory and Constructivism," *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 3 (1998): p. 260.: Modern and postmodern; Kurt Burch "Toward a Constructivist Comparative Politics," in *Constructivism and Comparative Politics*, Routledge, 2016, p. 59.: Norm-oriented, structure-oriented, and rule-oriented; Runa Das (2009): Structural, middle-ground, and critical; Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 6.: Modernist and postmodern or traditional, critical, and postmodern; Checkel "Constructivist Approaches to European Integration," in *Handbook of European Union Politics*, Arena, 2006, p. 2.: Conventional, interpretative, and critical/radical. Hopf "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23, no. 1, 1998, p. 172.: Conventional and critical.

¹⁶³ Rumelili, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁴ Checkel, "Constructivist Approaches to European Integration," p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ Sarina Theys, "Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory", 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/>.

¹⁶⁷ Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory", pp. 183–84.

¹⁶⁸ Bahar Rumelili, *Constructing Regional Community and Order in Europe and Southeast Asia*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 23.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

Migration Crisis and Hungary

The EU has been experiencing a significant influx of refugees from places including Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo, since 2013. Because of the protracted conflicts in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, particularly the Syrian Civil War, it is believed that this “crisis” of refugees in 2015 is the worst to have affected Europe since the Second World War (WWII)¹⁷⁰. In 2015, about one million migrants entered the territory of the EU. More than 800 people died in a separate catastrophe on the Mediterranean Sea in February 2015, which prompted the creation of unified European policies to address the migrant crisis¹⁷¹. As a result, the European Commission adopted the European Agenda on Migration on May 13, 2015, a strategic document that suggested several short-term steps as well as additional medium- and long-term actions¹⁷².

It is worth mentioning that, during the migration crisis, the EU’s institutions have had different priorities. While the Commission attempted to maintain the Schengen area and share responsibilities among the EU’s member states, the European Parliament focused on issues related to human rights. In addition to these differences, member states approached the migration question with various policies; while some have been pro-immigrant, others have adopted anti-immigrant policies¹⁷³.

One of the countries that have adopted anti-immigrant policies is Hungary. A large number of refugees attempted to breach the Hungarian border in the summer of 2015 because Hungary was one of the countries along the primary migratory routes¹⁷⁴. Hungary has served as a temporary stopover along a well-known migrant route that leads to Western Europe¹⁷⁵. The majority of immigrants in Hungary entered through the East Mediterranean or Balkan route, via Turkey-Greece-Macedonia and Serbia, or in some cases via Romania or Ukraine (before 2015), including those who came from Sub-Saharan African countries¹⁷⁶.

The migration crisis made Hungary’s emphasis on the Western Balkans in international relations even more evident. Since early 2015, the government’s political discourse has been dominated by the subject of migration, which has taken precedence over all other international and domestic policy issues¹⁷⁷. Following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015, Orbán first discussed his intentions to control immigration into Hungary. Subsequently, the government launched a planned, well-funded media campaign that vilified immigrants as a threat to national security, regardless of their motivations¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁰ İsmail Yazıcı, “Security and Immigration: Contested Perspectives on the Migration Crisis in Hungary,” 2021, p. 195.

¹⁷¹ Krisztina Juhász, “Assessing Hungary’s Stance on Migration and Asylum in Light of the European and Hungarian Migration Strategies,” *Politics in Central Europe* 13, no. 1, 2017, p. 36.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*.

¹⁷³ Selcen Öner, “Turkey as a Strategic Partner of the EU during the Refugee Crisis: The Challenges and Prospects,” in *A European Crisis: Perspectives on Refugees, Solidarity and Europe* (Stuttgart: Verlag Pub, 2018), 171.

¹⁷⁴ İsmail Yazıcı, “Security and Immigration: Contested Perspectives on the Migration Crisis in Hungary,” 2021, p. 195.

¹⁷⁵ Anikó Bernát et al., “Borders and the Mobility of Migrants in Hungary,” *CEASEVAL Deliverable* 4, 2019, p. 40.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁷ Beáta Huszka, “Euro-sceptic yet Pro-Enlargement: The Paradoxes of Hungary’s EU Policy,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 17, no. 4, 2017, p. 592.

¹⁷⁸ András Szalai, “Securitizing Migration in Contemporary Hungary: From Discourse to Practice”, in *CEEISA-ISA 2016 Joint International Conference (Ljubljana, 23 June 2016)*, 2015, p. 2.

When Hungary's government announced plans for a 175 km-long fence along the Serbian border and suspended the Dublin III regulation¹⁷⁹, the discursive securitization of migration in Hungary quickly gave way to more fundamental legal and regulatory reforms¹⁸⁰. The government set up a national consultation (*nemzeti konzultáció*) on migration, which was conducted by letters delivered to individuals' homes and inviting them to share their opinions on matters the government deems significant. Without a counterargument, these consultations acted virtually as referendums¹⁸¹.

According to a quota system under the Emergency Response Mechanism, which was enacted in September 2015, all EU member states were required to contribute to distributing 160,000 of the migrants. Hungary was urged to arrange housing for 1,294 war refugees. The decision of the EU Council of Ministers was approved with a majority of votes, although four countries abstained: Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Romania¹⁸².

In addition to these difficulties, the Hungarian parliament modified the asylum act twice in 2015, once in July and once in September¹⁸³. The new asylum act, which took effect on September 15, 2015, proclaimed a state of emergency at the border, enabling the deployment of troops during times of peace and the authority to investigate residences where migrants were allegedly taking refuge¹⁸⁴. These two amendments added clauses that limited Hungary's power to grant refuge. Because of this, they are against EU law, the principles of the European Court of Human Rights, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees¹⁸⁵.

As a result, the European Parliament voted in December 2015 on a resolution urging the European Commission to start the Rule of Law Framework. In December 2015, the European Commission initiated an infringement procedure against Hungary concerning the newly implemented refugee law¹⁸⁶. But, in the end, the Commission declined to begin the process, claiming that, while the situation in Hungary raised certain concerns, there was no systemic threat to the rule of law, democracy, or human rights¹⁸⁷.

In July 2016, Hungary implemented a new regulation that mandated the repatriation of individuals found within an eight-kilometre radius of the national border. These individuals have been returned to the transit zone located on the opposite side of the fence, on the Serbian border.

¹⁷⁹ Every single asylum application submitted on EU territory must be investigated, and each Member State must be able to choose whether and when it is in charge of processing an application for asylum European Commission, "Country Responsible for Asylum Application (Dublin Regulation)", 2020, [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/country-responsible-asylum-application-dublin-regulation_en].

¹⁸⁰ Daniel Gyollai and Umut Korkut, "Border Management and Migration Controls. Hungary Report", 2019, pp. 11–12.

¹⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

¹⁸² Gül Ceylan Tok, "The Politicization of Migration and the Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism in Hungary", *Akdeniz IIBF Dergisi* 18, no. 37, 2018, p. 101.

¹⁸³ Juhász, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹⁸⁴ Annastiina Kallius, Daniel Monterescu, and Prem Kumar Rajaram, "Immobilizing Mobility: Border Ethnography, Illiberal Democracy, and the Politics of the 'Refugee Crisis' in Hungary", *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 1, 2016, p. 33.

¹⁸⁵ Juhász, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹⁸⁶ Huszka, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

¹⁸⁷ Gábor Halmai, "National (Ist) Constitutional Identity?: Hungary's Road to Abuse Constitutional Pluralism", *Hungary's Road to Abuse Constitutional Pluralism*, 2017, p. 317.

In October 2016, the Hungarian Government conducted a referendum that urged the citizens to decline the EU's redistribution quotas¹⁸⁸. The initial measure undertaken was a referendum initiated by the government. Hence, on October 2, 2016, a referendum was held in Hungary to determine whether the EU should be granted the authority to enforce the transfer of non-Hungarian people to Hungary without the consent of the National Assembly. Even though the government's response to the question received agreement from 98% of all legally cast votes and 92% of the ballots cast, with 6% of the ballots being invalidated, the referendum was deemed null and void due to the participation of only approximately 40% of eligible voters¹⁸⁹.

Following the referendum, the government enacted stricter legal restrictions that made it very difficult to obtain asylum status and all but ended governmental assistance for admitted refugees. The legislation described at the start of this contribution was approved by the parliament on March 7, 2017, by a vote of 138 to 6. It permitted the government to hold asylum seekers, including children, in detention centres near the transit zones and to send them back from any location in Hungary to the Serbian border¹⁹⁰.

Before 2015, the Fundamental Law already had tight laws governing asylum, but since the passage of the Seventh Amendment in the summer of 2018, it has become nearly impossible to identify refugees¹⁹¹. Despite the inclusion of the non-refoulment principle and the prohibition on collective deportation, the Fundamental Law does not recognize refugees if they enter Hungary via a secure country or if there is another country where they would be protected. The Seventh Amendment has also reinstated the rule that laws governing asylum must be approved by a qualified (two-thirds) majority, just like laws governing foreign nationals' entry and stay in the nation, and it forbids the mass admittance (relocation/resettlement) of migrants¹⁹².

Additionally, the Hungarian government operated a billboard campaign throughout 2017 opposing George Soros' pro-immigration attitude, as a follow-up to an anti-immigrant billboard campaign launched in the spring of 2015¹⁹³. In order to reduce encouraging and enabling illegal immigration, Hungary passed the so-called "Stop Soros" package of measures in June 2018. By making support for asylum and residency applications a crime punishable by incarceration, the law, which went into effect in July 2018, altered the criminal code. Assistance to unauthorized immigrants is prohibited by law for any people or organizations¹⁹⁴.

Methodology

The study utilizes critical discourse analysis as a method to reach its goals and present its arguments. In this context, the study centred on three techniques of critical discourse analysis:

¹⁸⁸ Huszka, *op. cit.*, p. 603.

¹⁸⁹ Halmai, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

¹⁹⁰ Tok, "The Politicization of Migration and the Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism in Hungary", p. 103.

¹⁹¹ Bernát et al., "Borders and the Mobility of Migrants in Hungary", p. 7.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*.

¹⁹³ Bori Simonovits, "The Public Perception of the Migration Crisis from the Hungarian Point of View: Evidence from the Field", *Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities*, 2020, p. 156.

¹⁹⁴ Livia Benková, "Hungary-Orbán's Project towards 'Illiberal Democracy'", *AIES Fokus* 2, 2019, p. 2.

conceptual metaphor analysis, the use of pronouns, and argumentation. When formulating a comprehensive theory of context and how it relates to discourse, we cannot confine ourselves to a more focused examination of, for example, pronouns, turn-taking, or metaphor (each already representing a vast field of research) ¹⁹⁵.

A conceptual metaphor is a comparison or metaphor when one idea or conceptual realm is understood in terms of another¹⁹⁶. The goal of the study was to identify metaphors that reflected the ideas and justifications behind the concepts and arguments of securitization, de-Europeanization, preserving power in the country, and blaming the EU. The difference between those that are considered to be inside or outside of a group is generally indicated by the ideological pronouns “us” vs. “them”¹⁹⁷. The pronoun “we” is used by politicians when they want to engage the audience or convey a sense of community and responsibility sharing. Moreover, in political speeches, the pronoun “they” is employed to stereotype others and divide people into categories¹⁹⁸. In the case of Hungary’s migration issue, Orbán used to define Brussels and immigrants as others. Argumentation is the last technique used in the study. An introduction to analysing, assessing, and delivering oral and written argumentation is referred to as argumentation. Argumentation is a speech act¹⁹⁹, and its main objective is to support a point of view²⁰⁰.

Hungary Challenges the EU’s Migration Policy: a Critical Discourse Analysis of Orbán’s Speeches and Interviews

Conceptual Metaphor Analysis

- Securitization (first argument): Political Earthquake, Invasion, Tension;
- De-Europeanization (second argument): Flower being eaten away by a hidden worm, Put the cart before the horse, Open the doors, The bitter fruit of its cosmopolitan immigration policy;
- To protect his power in the country (third argument): Defending, Disputing and fighting, Attacked, Biting of our ankles, Victim;
- Blaming the EU (fourth argument): Weak and paralyzed, Defenceless.

Conceptual metaphor analysis is the first technique used in the study. Orbán used metaphors to explain the EU’s mass movement of migration. He described migration as “a slow

¹⁹⁵ Teun A. Van Dijk, *Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. XII.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Nordquist, “What Are Conceptual Metaphors?”, ThoughtCo, 2019, [https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-conceptual-metaphor-1689899].

¹⁹⁷ Van Dijk, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁹⁸ Maia Alavidze, “The Use of Pronouns in Political Discourse”, *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 9, no. 4, 2016, p. 349.

¹⁹⁹ Frans H. Van Eemeren et al., “Argumentation,” *Reasonableness and Effectiveness in Argumentative Discourse: Fifty Contributions to the Development of Pragma-Dialectics*, 2015, p. 53.

²⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

and steady current of water which washes away the shore”²⁰¹. Excerpt 1 shows that Orbán used the metaphor of tension to present the importance of mass immigrant movements. In 2014, he defined the mass movement of immigrants as a “political earthquake”²⁰². Also, he utilized the concept of “invasion”, to explain his country and Europe’s challenges towards immigrants, particularly Muslim immigrants (Excerpt 4)²⁰³. Orbán focused on European values and claimed that they were on the brink of existence due to migration flows. In excerpt 5, Orbán described it as “we may lose our European values – our very identity – by degrees like the live frog allowing itself to be slowly cooked to death in a pan of water”. In excerpt 15, he stated: “If things continue like this, our culture, our identity, and our nations as we know them will cease to exist. Our worst nightmares will have become reality...”. These metaphors can be used to explain Orbán’s statement regarding the securitization process.

To criticize Brussels, he used the phrase “put the cart before the horse”²⁰⁴, meaning that the EU has done something in the wrong order. In excerpt 10, Orbán stated that “we shall not allow Brussels to force upon us the bitter fruit of its cosmopolitan immigration policy...” Furthermore, he used the phrase “open the doors...” to criticize the EU for the fact that it could not protect its external borders (Excerpt 2). These metaphors prove that Orbán criticized the EU’s policies on migration issue.

According to Orbán, the EU was weak and fragile (Excerpt 6, 12), and he compared the EU’s situation to a “flower being eaten away by a hidden worm”²⁰⁵. He used the metaphor of “defending” the country’s migration policies against the EU. He also used the phrase “disputing and fighting” to show that he was against and challenging the EU’s mandatory quotas. Orbán described the country’s situation by using the metaphor of “victim” (Excerpt 17). These metaphors were employed to safeguard his position of power in Hungary.

The Use of Pronouns

- We-Us: Mostly Hungarians, Europeans (Christian Europe);
- They-Them: Brussels, Immigrants (Economic immigrants, Invaders, Muslim immigrants, Enemies);

Others as Invaders, Enemies: Securitization (first argument);

²⁰¹ Victor Orbán, “Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on 15 March – Miniszterelnok.Hu”, 2016, [<https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-15-march/>].

²⁰² Victor Orbán, “Orbán Viktor’s Speech at the Europe Forum Conference”, Government, 2014, [<https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/orban-viktor-s-speech-at-the-europe-forum-conference>].

²⁰³ Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Address in Parliament before the Start of Daily Business”, Government, 2015, [<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-address-in-parliament-before-the-start-of-daily-business>].

²⁰⁴ Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Address to Parliament before the Start of Daily Business”, Government, 2015, [<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-address-to-parliament-before-the-start-of-daily-business>].

²⁰⁵ Victor Orbán, “Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on 15 March – Miniszterelnok.Hu”.

Other as Brussels: De-Europeanization (second argument) and blaming the EU (fourth argument).

The second research methodology used in the study is the analysis of pronoun usage. Regarding the political context, the Hungarian government purposefully avoided using the terms “asylum seekers” and “refugees” in its official communications during the 2015 migration crisis, choosing instead to use the terms “illegal migrants” and “economic migrants” to frame public discourse²⁰⁶. Orbán classified the people who tried to come to Europe as “economic migrants, refugees, and foreign fighters”²⁰⁷. He portrayed the Muslim immigrants as enemies of their civilization and linked the migration crisis to George Soros (Excerpt 14); he claimed that Soros’s NGOs tried to settle one million immigrants to Europe²⁰⁸.

In analysing the usage of pronouns in Orbán’s remarks, we can observe in excerpts 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 13, 14, and 17 that he predominantly used the pronoun “we”, with reference to Hungary and the Hungarian people, to defend the country’s interest by blaming the EU. In excerpts 5 and 15, Orbán identified as European by stating “We may lose our European values...” and “If things continue like this, our culture, our identity, and our nations as we know them will cease to exist”. In addition, in excerpt 11, he differentiated Europe from Brussels and, by using the pronoun “we”, he described the country’s identity as European.

Argumentations

- Orbán “securitized” the migration question and considered immigrants as being a threat to the European civilization, culture, religion, and lifestyle.
- Orbán stepped up toward the “de-Europeanization” path of migration.
- Orbán used the immigrants to protect and increase its power in Hungary as he portrayed them as the enemies.
- Orbán blamed the EU and claimed that their anti-immigrant actions had not only saved Hungary, but also protected the EU.

The last approach in this study is argumentation. Orbán regularly mentioned that the mass movement of migrations threatened the European identity (European civilization), (Excerpt 5) culture and civilization, its religion, family and lifestyle, customs, and traditions, as well as the status of nation-state. In addition, immigrants could represent the cause of chaos, upheaval, crime, and fear. The “migrant-Islam-terrorist nexus” became the main topic in migration-related discussions, due to Orbán and his government, and their allies in the media. Therefore, security related to (Muslim) terrorism had evolved into the official political narrative, dictating how the migration/refugee problem should be understood²⁰⁹.

²⁰⁶ Simonovits, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

²⁰⁷ Victor Orbán, “Speech of Viktor Orbán at the EPP Congress”, *Government*, 2015, [<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/speech-of-viktor-orban-at-the-epp-congress20151024>].

²⁰⁸ Victor Orbán, “Viktor Orbán’s Reply in the European Parliament – Miniszterelnok.Hu”, 2017, [<https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/viktor-orbans-reply-in-the-european-parliament/>].

²⁰⁹ Zsuzsanna Vidra, “Dominant Islamophobic Narratives: Hungary”, *Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies Working Paper 7*, 2017, p. 12.

Excerpts 4, 10, and 15 clarified the first argumentative discourse of the study, which pertains to the securitization of migration-related statements made by Orbán. We should consider that critical constructivists assert that a state's concept of itself arises through the process of self-reflexive evaluation. Through the above-mentioned ideas, Orbán substantially declared who they were and who immigrants were. As a result of these differentiations, identities have been formed in this process. The majority is represented by the Hungarian people; therefore, they are represented as the dominant group who has the power of deciding over immigrants, in Orbán's remarks.

The second argumentative discourse analysis of this study indicates that Orbán leveraged the migration crisis to safeguard and augment his position of power in Hungary. He first securitized the immigrants and presented them as the enemy. In order to deal with the migration crisis, he demanded the construction of fences between the borders of Hungary and Serbia. Furthermore, he changed the asylum act in the country and held a referendum. Excerpts 6, 10, 11, 13, and 14 support Orbán's stance that the Hungarian people should decide on this matter. Therefore, it is argued that these populist actions can be perceived as useful tools for Orbán to maintain and increase his power.

The third discourse analysis conducted in this study pertains to Orbán's policies concerning the process of de-Europeanization. The phenomenon of de-Europeanization has a positive correlation with the prevalence of Euroscepticism. As is can be seen in excerpts 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, most of Orbán's remarks have a de-Europeanization tendency. He generally opposed the EU's mandatory quotas system (Excerpts 2, 4, 8, 13) for immigrants and he was against any policies that backed immigration policies (Excerpt 1). He asserted that they would not accept a European strategy from those who wanted to push them to adapt and become like them, in the face of the global refugee crisis or the migratory storm. Hungarians need to determine who and what they wish to resemble²¹⁰.

Orbán made contentious remarks by accusing the EU of being weak in solving the migration crisis (Excerpts 3, 4, 7, 12, 14). In Excerpts 9 and 11, he also mentioned that they would challenge the EU's mandatory migration proposals. According to Orbán, distinctions in policies between federalist intended countries and sovereign nation-states made solutions to the migration crisis harder (Excerpts 6, 11, 13, 14, 17). The solution proposed by him to the migration crisis included the protection of external borders, of the European culture and its economic interests, and giving people the right to have a say in European decisions. In addition, he claimed that Europe must have the military power to solve the migration crisis. He considered that, since the EU did not have a common policy to solve the migration crisis, sovereign nations must deal with it.

In excerpts 16 and 17, Orbán claimed that Hungary was a victim of the migration crisis; however, he asserted that his policies did not only safeguarded Hungary but also had a protective effect on the EU. In conclusion, it is argued that the remarks made by Orbán regarding

²¹⁰ Victor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Reply in Parliament", *Government*, 2015, [<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-reply-in-parliament>].

securitization, de-Europeanization, safeguarding his power within the country, and attributing blame to the EU, serve to illustrate his opposition to the EU's migration policy.

In addition, it should be noted that, in 2017, Orbán declared that “we will of course be letting in genuine refugees: Germans, Dutch, French and Italians, terrified politicians and journalists, Christians who have been forced to leave their homes and who here in Hungary want to find the Europe they have lost in their homelands.”²¹¹ It can be deduced from these remarks that Christian immigrants were considered as those who shared the same identity as Orbán, therefore he would welcome them. We should keep in mind that the normative power identity of the EU and Hungary's own identity is harmed by a mindset that divides immigrants into religious categories, accepts those who follow their religion, and rejects those who follow other religions.

Table 1. Excerpts from Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speeches:

Excerpt 1	“We do not want any policies that back immigration, nor do we want migrating masses that cause tension that is impossible to contain; however, want policies aimed at encouraging childbirth and the reversal of the natural decline of the population” ²¹²
Excerpt 2	“I am convinced that the proposal which we are now familiar with, the proposal of the European Commission, is – to be absolutely frank – nothing short of absurd, bordering on the insane. I am convinced that it is a dangerous approach to say “There is no problem here: let us open the doors wide and allow everyone in” ²¹³ .
Excerpt 3	“In 2012 the European Union forced us to change the Hungarian regulations, and since that time economic migrants have flooded into the country. We would not have a problem today if you had not forced Hungary to change its regulations.” ²¹⁴ .
Excerpt 4	“A Europe which requires its half a billion citizens to respect its laws is unable to persuade migrants to undergo a simple registration process. Brussels' policies and the great powers made the situation even worse when they proved to be unable to grasp the root of the problem and saw people who are clearly illegal economic migrants as being refugees. ... What is happening now is an invasion; we are being invaded. It is, however, a daily experience in Europe now that those who

²¹¹ Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's State of the Nation Address – Miniszterelnok.Hu”, 2017, [https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-2/].

²¹² Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister's Speech after Taking the Oath of Office”, *Government*, 2014, [https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/prime-minister-s-speech-after-taking-the-oath-of-office].

²¹³ Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech in the European Parliament”, *Government*, 2015, [https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-in-the-european-parliament].

²¹⁴ Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Response to Questions from Members of the European Parliament”, *Government*, 2015, [https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-response-to-questions-from-members-of-the-european-parliament].

	have been invaded are unable to offer shelter." ... "Proposals such as the quota system merely address the consequences, rather than the causes. This is not a European action plan. The underlying philosophy of the quota system is not aimed at ensuring that no more economic migrants come to Europe or protecting Europe and the European way of life. It would instead spread the problem-based, I believe, on the silent recognition that migrants who have already entered Europe illegally will be reluctant to go back home. In response to this, we Hungarians say: leaders in Brussels have put the cart before the horse." ²¹⁵ .
Excerpt 5	"We may lose our European values – our very identity – by degrees, like the live frog allowing itself to be slowly cooked to death in a pan of water. Quite simply there will be more and more Muslims, and Europe will be transformed beyond recognition." ²¹⁶
Excerpt 6	"In the storm of migration, or the storm of the global refugee crisis, this gives us the right to insist that we shall not accept a European policy from those seeking to force us – explicitly or implicitly – to change, and to become like them. We want to decide what we are like and whom we want to resemble. This is our own sovereign, national decision. ... We Hungarians alone are able to decide on this. This cannot be dictated from the UN Headquarters in New York, and not even from the headquarters in Brussels. This can only be the decision of the Hungarian people." ²¹⁷ .
Excerpt 7	"Whichever way we look at it, the EU is rudderless. It is weak, uncertain and paralysed. There are meetings and conferences galore, but there are no solutions. ...In Brussels they are still claiming that immigration is a good thing. Meanwhile, day after day we see evidence that immigration is a bad thing. It is not a win-win situation, but lose-lose." ²¹⁸
Excerpt 8	"Mandatory resettlement quotas are quite simply not Europe: they are a complete contradiction of the spirit of Europe. They are pointless, because they do not resolve the crisis, but aggravate it." ²¹⁹
Excerpt 9	"I would like to take this opportunity to announce that, after Slovakia's decision yesterday, Hungary will today file a petition with the European Court contesting the decision of the European Commission on its plan to resettle migrants on the territory of Hungary on a mandatory basis. Two countries have resorted to this

²¹⁵ Victor Orbán, Government, 2015, [<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-address-in-parliament-before-the-start-of-daily-business>].

²¹⁶ Victor Orbán, Government, 2016, [<https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-address-in-parliament-before-the-start-of-daily-business/>].

²¹⁷ Victor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Reply in Parliament", *Government*, 2015, [<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-reply-in-parliament>].

²¹⁸ Victor Orbán, "Speech of Viktor Orbán at the EPP Congress", *Government*, 2015, [<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/speech-of-viktor-orban-at-the-epp-congress20151024>].

²¹⁹ Victor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Address in Parliament before the Start of Daily Business", *Government*, 2015, [<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-address-in-parliament-before-the-start-of-daily-business>].

	approach: Slovakia and Hungary. Both countries will have submitted their petitions to the European Court by this afternoon.” ²²⁰ .
Excerpt 10	“The main danger to Europe’s future does not come from those who want to come here, but from Brussels’ fanatics of internationalism. We cannot allow Brussels to place itself above the law. We shall not allow it to force upon us the bitter fruit of its cosmopolitan immigration policy. We shall not import to Hungary crime, terrorism, homophobia and synagogue-burning anti-Semitism.” ²²¹ .
Excerpt 11	“Contemptuously bypassing and evading the principle of national sovereignty represented by the prime ministers of Member States, they arranged for the adoption of this law in the European Parliament. We dispute this decision, and we are fighting for its nullification in the European Court. It seems that, in Brussels as well as Hungary, eating increases the appetite. Therefore they want to build a system applied to every immigrant and every Member State, which will ensure the compulsory, permanent and continuous distribution of immigrants. My Friends, the EU clearly divides into two camps: on the one side are the federalists, and on the other are the supporters of sovereignty.”... “I suggest that we rely on the ancient source of European democracy: the will of the people. If it is true that the people do not want the current insane immigration policy from Brussels – and indeed they oppose it – we should make room for their voice, and listen to what they have to say.” ²²² .
Excerpt 12	“Europe is defenceless and weak. Brussels’ policy for handling the migration crisis has clearly failed – and not just in the eyes of Hungarian citizens, but now also in the eyes of European public opinion. And the even worse news is that Brussels and the European Union not only lacks the capability to protect itself, but also the will to do so.” ²²³ .
Excerpt 13	“The quotas are flawed. We need the fence, we need external borders and we need protected areas outside the European Union. We must decide who we let in, and who we do not let in. But who should decide on this: Brussels or the nation states?” ²²⁴ .
Excerpt 14	“And we don’t understand why the Commission is criticising the Hungarian public work program year after year in its annual report, which is an important element of the workfare and not welfare society that we built. These are currently

²²⁰ Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Speech at the 14th Plenary Session of the Hungarian Standing Conference – Miniszterelnok.Hu”, 2015, [https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-14th-plenary-session-of-the-hungarian-standing-conference/].

²²¹ Victor Orbán, “Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on 15 March – Miniszterelnok.Hu”, [https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-15-march/].

²²² Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s State of the Nation Address – Miniszterelnok.Hu”, 2016, [https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address/].

²²³ Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Preliminary Address to Parliament – Miniszterelnok.Hu”, 2016, [https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-preliminary-address-to-parliament/].

²²⁴ Victor Orbán, “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Address in Parliament before the Start of Daily Business – Miniszterelnok.Hu”, 2016, [https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-address-in-parliament-before-the-start-of-daily-business/].

	debated issues. Our position is that we do not want change in these questions, we don't want to reorganise national and Union competences in these matters, thus we are defending the current status quo – formulated by our common will. Hence the term "Stop Brussels". Is this a sin?" ²²⁵ .
Excerpt 15	"If things continue like this, our culture, our identity and our nations as we know them will cease to exist. Our worst nightmares will have become reality. The West will fall, as Europe is occupied without realising it." ²²⁶
Excerpt 16	"In European politics not a day goes by without someone biting at our ankles: we are being attacked by the pro-immigration bureaucrats in Brussels, as well as pro-immigration national governments. These four countries are being attacked from the Soros network's gun emplacements." ²²⁷ .
Excerpt 17	"And now Hungary is the victim of this situation: we've been found guilty on the basis of a set of regulations adopted in more peaceful times, and we could even be punished financially because we're not letting in people whom they believe we should let in." ²²⁸

Conclusion

The methodology used in this paper moved from critical discourse analysis by adopting critical social constructivism. We have used for this study conceptual metaphor analysis, pronoun usage, and argumentation analysis. Hence, we have observed that Orbán used metaphors to support his ideas: such as "invaders" to describe Muslim immigrants (securitization), or to describe the EU as weak, etc. (de-Europeanization and blaming the EU). Also, the study concludes that Orbán considers immigrants as the other (them), aspect that is implied by the usage of pronouns in his statements. Furthermore, four interrelated discursive arguments have been identified from the examination of 40 speeches and interviews that Orbán delivered between 2013 and 2022.

Firstly, Orbán has implemented a securitization strategy concerning migration, whereby he perceives immigrants as posing a threat to European civilization, culture, religion, and lifestyle. He stated that the presence of immigrants correlated with an increase in incidents of terrorism, criminal activity, and violence perpetrated against women. Additionally, he established a connection between the matter of migration and the initiatives of George Soros's non-governmental organizations, contending that such endeavours would facilitate the entrance of Muslims into the country. Orbán frequently utilized the concepts of Hungarian and European

²²⁵ Victor Orbán, "Viktor Orbán's Reply in the European Parliament – Miniszterelnok.Hu", 2017, [<https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/viktor-orbans-reply-in-the-european-parliament/>].

²²⁶ Victor Orbán, "Viktor Orbán's 'State of the Nation' Address – Miniszterelnok.Hu", 2018, [<https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address/>].

²²⁷ Victor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech in Parliament before the Start of Daily Business – Miniszterelnok.Hu", 2018, [<https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-in-parliament-before-the-start-of-daily-business/>].

²²⁸ Victor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Answers to Questions from Journalists – Miniszterelnok.Hu", 2021, [<https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-answers-to-questions-from-journalists/>].

identity to portray immigrants as distinct from them. Moreover, through his discourse, he constructed the identities of immigrants as individuals occupying a lower social position. In other words, Orbán utilized a discourse that portrayed immigrants as a threat to the civilization of the dominant Christian population in the EU. The aforementioned inferences from Orbán's speeches indicate the suitability of employing critical constructivism.

Secondly, Orbán leveraged the presence of immigrants to fortify and augment his political influence in Hungary by characterizing them as enemies. In order to protect and promote his power, he followed a populist migration policy such as fencing borders between Hungary and Serbia, changing asylum law, having a referendum about the EU's mandatory quotas, and so on.

Thirdly, Orbán has taken a more assertive stance on the process of "de-Europeanization" in relation to migration. He expressed criticism towards the policies and actions of the EU concerning immigrants and advocated for a nationalistic approach; namely, individual countries should take autonomous action unless the EU adopts a unified policy. Put in another way, Orbán has relied on national sovereignty as a justification for non-compliance, and - in response to the EU's attempts to address the migration problem - has used the nation's constitutional identity, which is protected by Article 4(2) TEU²²⁹. The Hungarian response to the migration crisis, particularly fencing its borders with Serbia, changing its asylum law, and rejecting the mandatory relocation plan for the entire EU are a clear example of "de-Europeanization" and challenges the EU's decision-making process. Hungary's decision to abstain from participating in the collective efforts of the EU to address the migration crisis has arguably played a role in impeding the EU's ability to formulate a cohesive and coordinated response²³⁰.

Lastly, Orbán blamed the EU for not being able to find a proper solution for the migration crisis. Furthermore, he stated that Hungary was a transit country for immigrants; however, by implementing its policies and measures against immigration, Hungary would not only protect itself, but it would also safeguard Europe.

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²²⁹ Halmai, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

²³⁰ Huszka, *op. cit.*, p. 604.

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From Trump to War: Normative Implications of Japan's Crisis Management

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Abstract

In the last years, the dynamics of the international context have significantly intensified. Accordingly, profound moments of crises affected global and regional security. This paper examines Japan's crisis management and foreign policy in the context of the Trump Administration, the coronavirus pandemic, and the War in Ukraine. Using a Socio-Constructivist approach, it focuses on identity, norms, and power. The paper assesses the impact of the Trump Administration and the pandemic on global relations, highlighting the concept of a leaderless world. Additionally, it explores the normative effects of the War in Ukraine on Asian politics, including Japan's unprecedented alignment with its G7 allies and the challenge of redefining its pacifism in a changing world, by addressing the existing legitimacy and capacity deficits.

Keywords: social-constructivism, crisis management, Japan, Asian security

1. Introduction

In recent years, the stage of international relations has witnessed an unprecedented intensification of dynamics, showcasing profound moments of crisis. The paper attempts to explore the normative implications of Japan's crisis management and foreign policy strategies against the backdrop of three pivotal global events: the trans-Pacific fracture lines developed during the Trump Administration, the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Based on the socio-constructivist approach, the analysis focuses on key concepts such as identity, norms and power to underscore the importance of non-material elements in understanding international relations. Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative approach, using content and discourse analysis as research strategies, while also drawing insights from quantitative data such as surveys and economic indicators. In analyzing the normative impact of these episodes of crisis, we will introduce the concept of leaderless world, revealing the impact of the Trump administration and of the pandemic on Japanese foreign policy. Moreover, the war in Ukraine brought into question fundamental security-related uncertainties for Tōkyō.

Accordingly, the paper is structured around several research questions: How did the trans-Pacific fracture lines formed during the Trump administration impact Japan's foreign policy and its regional relationships? In what ways did Japan address shortcomings in global leadership throughout the pandemic, and to what extent did these efforts shape international norms? What is the significance of Japan's role on the regional stage, particularly through its commitment to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FIOP)? How has the war in Ukraine challenged Japan's commitment to pacifism and its passive role on the international stage (given its response to the Crimean invasion of 2014)?

2. Social-Constructivism: Why Non-Material Elements Matter

The outstanding tradition in International Relations Theory was to place a substantial and dominant emphasis on material aspects, such as military might and economic prosperity. As consecrated traditional approaches, Realism and Liberalism focus on the fact that “states have enduring interests such as power and wealth, and are constrained in their ability to further those interests because of material forces such as geography, technology and the distribution of power”²³¹. Towards the end of the Cold War, it became widely accepted that various social, non-material factors, including culture, norms and identities, influence both the structure of international politics and how states behave and become embedded in it.

Consequently, as the global stage of politics became increasingly dynamic and intense, we have decided to adopt the Socio-Constructivist perspective as our theoretical framework. Therefore, the paper focuses on the role and importance of norms and identities in relation to the impact that the Trump administration, the coronavirus pandemic and the War in Ukraine had upon Japan as a global actor. Moreover, it also attempts to define the concept of power, as it represents a significant facet of Japan’s involvement on the regional and global stages.

The interpretative perspective that emphasizes ideas and shared-values puts forth the ideational premise which “contrasts with the materialist-rationalist focus on tangible material interests. The two epistemologies are not mutually exclusive, however”²³². This, in turn, does not mean that power, interest (as endorsed by Realism), international institutions, and economic interdependence (as endorsed by Liberalism) are void of meaning, but that such categories draw meaning and importance based on ideas and identities.

2.1. Norms

Social-Constructivism focuses on a constitutive approach to understanding norms. Thus, “the meaning of power and the content of interests are largely a function of ideas. As such only after the ideational conditions of possibility for power and interest explanations have been exposed and stripped out can we assess the effects of materiality as such”²³³.

Subsequently, it is crucial to clearly operationalize norms as an analytical tool. In this sense, we use this concept “to describe collective expectations for the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity”²³⁴. In other words, the conceptualization used in our paper revolves around certain specific elements, namely ‘expectations’, ‘behaviour’ and ‘identity’. Expectations are made out of assumptions of appropriateness and acceptance of a certain behaviour in a particular and given context. Besides, they play a fundamental role in norm enforcement and rejection as they

²³¹ Michael Barnett, “Social Constructivism,” in John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, 8th edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 193.

²³² Yoichiro Sato and Keiko Hirata, “Introduction: Constructivism, Rationalism, and the Study of Norms in Japanese Foreign Policy,” in Yoichiro Sato and Keiko Hirata (eds.), *Norms, Interests, and Power in Japanese Foreign Policy*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 5.

²³³ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

²³⁴ Peter J. Katzenstein, “Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security,” in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 5.

are usually based on a multitude of factors, ranging from cultural specificities to historical developments and experiences. Lastly, norms are fundamentally linked to identities of actors. As we operationalize the concept at a later point, we can simply define identity as “the social understanding of the self in relationship to an ‘other’”²³⁵. In other words, identity refers to the ways in which actors define themselves and are defined by others in the international system, based on several criteria. Due to their conceptual complexity, norms have been divided into different categories. One of the most common categorizations makes a distinction between “regulative norms, which order and constrain behaviour, and constitutive norms, which create new actors, interests, or categories of action”²³⁶. In this sense, they are not natural and constant, but rather dynamic, being impacted by the changes both in the actors’ identities and in the international system itself. Regarding our analysis, we will focus on several constitutive norms that had an impact on Japan’s crisis management in relation to the Trump administration, the coronavirus pandemic and the War in Ukraine. Therefore, we will focus on such issues as pacifism, leaderless world, proactive diplomacy and value-oriented diplomacy.

2.2. Identities

According to Social-Constructivism, identity holds a significant role in influencing and shaping the behaviour of actors on the international scene. In this sense, a state’s identity “is constructed by its own cultures and institutions, norms that it pays respect to, and particular roles in the international context, being modified over time through social experiences”²³⁷. Moreover, identity gains inferential power and legitimacy when it relates to another identity. For our paper, the operationalization goes beyond a national identity that employs specific cultural and traditional references. Obviously, national identity plays a fundamental role, as Japan upholds its unique cultural references and traditional mythology. However, we will focus on the domain of International Relations and how identities are (re)formed through norms, institutions (which can be defined as collections of norms) and shared social interactions. For Realism “territorial boundaries must also be boundaries of identities and interest, such that where a state’s authority stops so must its conception of Self and interest”²³⁸. In this sense, the concept of identity, although gaining influence from intra-state elements, cannot be reduced to territorial borders.

Fundamentally, by focusing on various identity and norm-related elements, Japan “creates specific policy ideas that are drawn from such identities as diplomatic means to maintain its presence and influence in the region”²³⁹ and to maintain its role as a global actor on the international stage.

²³⁵ Michael Barnett, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

²³⁶ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change”, *International Organization* 52, no. 4, 1998, p. 891.

²³⁷ Hidetaka Yoshimatsu, “Identity, Policy Ideas, and Asian Diplomacy: Japan’s Response to the Rise of China”, *International Area Studies Review* 15, no. 4, 2012: p. 361.

²³⁸ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 212.

²³⁹ Hidetaka Yoshimatsu, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

2.3. Power

Power represents a central concept in International Relations and in world politics. Throughout history, the values imbued in the concept of power were rather dynamic, according to various factors. The dominance of materialist theories (especially of Realism) meant that power was commonly translated in military might and survival trumped the security agenda. In this sense, power is associated with control and influence, and it puts forth the ability to shape the behaviour of other actors in order to attain certain goals. In a structural environment in which conflict is endemic, power becomes a prerequisite for survival. Nonetheless, since the end of the Cold War, the various “forms of vulnerability have increased, and trade-offs among policies are designed to deal with different vulnerabilities”²⁴⁰. Given the succeeding diffusion of power, military might and economic prowess do not represent the only constitutive elements. Most importantly, as mentioned earlier with the relevance of non-material elements (in relation to norms and identities), “the changing nature of international politics has also made intangible forms of power more important”²⁴¹. In this sense, ideational elements do have a fundamental role in exercising power. This aspect is usually defined as co-optive power or soft power²⁴², which contrasts the materialist view of hard power. This, in turn, does not mean that hard power as a concept and as an empirical dimension is void of meaning and relevance, but utilizing military capabilities became increasingly difficult, due to various reasons. Moreover, the hard dimension (as we will see later) remains a fundamental aspect of power, but it is insufficient on its own.

Finally, the purpose of this part was to provide clarifications for the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in our paper. Norms, identities and other non-material elements per se are usually separated and delineated from power, interest and economic interdependency. However, such a reductionist perspective invalidates significant aspects of explanatory power. Rather than treating these perspectives as mutually exclusive, the paper adopts the Socio-Constructivist perspective to understand how norms, identities and classifications of power are (socially) constructed and utilized in relation to three episodes of crisis. Consequently, for Social-Constructivism, the international system is “a constitutive realm, the site that generates actors as knowledgeable social and political agents, the realm that makes them who they are”²⁴³.

3. The Trump Administration and the Coronavirus Pandemic

The fracture lines developed during the Trump administration had a profound impact on Japan-US relations. The divisions became evident in areas such as trade policies, approaches to understanding relations (namely a movement towards bilateralism) and global leadership. Moreover, these disputes not only affected the economic domain, but had an effect at the level of ideas, especially in relations to Trump’s multilateralist skepticism and disparities in global

²⁴⁰ Joseph S. Nye, “Soft Power”, *Foreign Policy*, no. 80, 1990, p. 157.

²⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 164.

²⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 166.

²⁴³ Christian Reus-Smit, “Constructivism”, in Scott Burchill et al. (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*, 3rd Edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 199.

leadership. The coronavirus pandemic represents a significant episode of crisis whose effects vastly surpassed the medical and health-related dimensions. As a global issue, the pandemic also had an impact on the international stage. However, there are different perspectives regarding the very nature of its impact in terms of International Relations. For example, Freyberg-Inan drew attention to the fact that the initial responses were developed and integrated at state-level, exhibiting the “limits of international cooperation emerging from coordination problems, conflicts of interest, and high short-term salience for national survival”²⁴⁴. Such a perspective exhibits the Realist focus on survival and self-help, as states prioritized their own wellbeing, regardless of the trans-national impact of the crisis.

3.1. The Burden of Uncertainty: Japan's Encounter with a Leaderless World during the Trump Era and the Pandemic

Nonetheless, the conflicting tendencies adopted during the Trump administration and the coronavirus pandemic also manifested other significant political and social effects. In terms of international politics, the paper will focus on the concept of leaderless world, which will be used to refer to a global order in which traditional leaders (especially states) manifest diminished influence and regulatory power. This power (both in its hard stance, and its soft one) is more widely diffused among actors. In our specific case, Japan has traditionally relied on its alliance with the US as the focal point of its foreign policy strategies. Moreover, Japan was also perceived as the supportive participant (due to its limited influence on the international stage). The coronavirus pandemic and the Trump administration exemplify the various challenges associated with a leaderless world.

Trump's electoral victory in 2016 marked a significant point in US politics. Through the 'America First' discourse, the Trump administration ushered an era of protectionism, dominated by a “multilateralist phobia”²⁴⁵, challenging the dominant norms of the liberal international order which played a significant role in Japan's economic development post World-War II. Foremost, the new US administration generated economic and trade-related uncertainties for Tōkyō, as it focused on imposing trade tariffs. Ideas related to the unequal status of the trade partnership and the relative disadvantages for the US began to foster in 1987 for Donald Trump, when he wrote a letter addressed to the 'American People' claiming that “Japan and other nations have been taking advantage of the United States”²⁴⁶. Such a discourse, which continued throughout Trump's presidency, indicates his transactional interpretation of international politics. Furthermore, treating partnerships and alliances mostly in economic indicators (especially gains) undermines the nature of the liberal order (based on norms and rules). Japan signed the trade agreement with US in 2019, agreement that focused on several key areas, such as improved market access for

²⁴⁴ Annette Freyberg-Inan, “Separating the Old from the New, or the Death of Liberal Order (Not from COVID-19)”, *International Studies Review* 23, no. 3, September 2021, p. 1104.

²⁴⁵ Șerban Filip Cioculescu, “Understanding the Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China: Historical Facts, Main trends, Actors and Decision-Making Bodies”, in Valentin Naumescu (ed.), *Great Powers' Foreign Policy: Approaching the Global Competition and the Russian War against the West*, Leiden: Brill, 2023, p. 118.

²⁴⁶ Jacob M. Schlesinger, “Trump Forged His Ideas on Trade in the 1980s-and Never Deviated”, *The Wall Street Journal*, November 15, 2018, [https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-forged-his-ideas-on-trade-in-the-1980sand-never-deviated-1542304508], Accessed August 06, 2023.

American agricultural goods and several industrial products (providing new economic opportunities for farmers). In terms of statistics, the US trade requirements did not translate in substantial benefits (as we can see in Image 1²⁴⁷ - although certain improvements became evident), while several tariffs have even been removed in 2022.

However, these measures manifested a significant influence at the level of ideas. The agreement and tariffs reinforced the ‘America First’ agenda, by prioritizing American economic interests. The material effects of various initiatives remained rather limited due to Prime Minister’s Abe approach, as he engaged in consistent dialogue with Trump. In this sense, “Abe succeeded in forestalling any radical change in the alliance, his response to Trump’s transactional approach to alliance management mutate into a spectacle of one-sided concessions and humiliations”²⁴⁸.

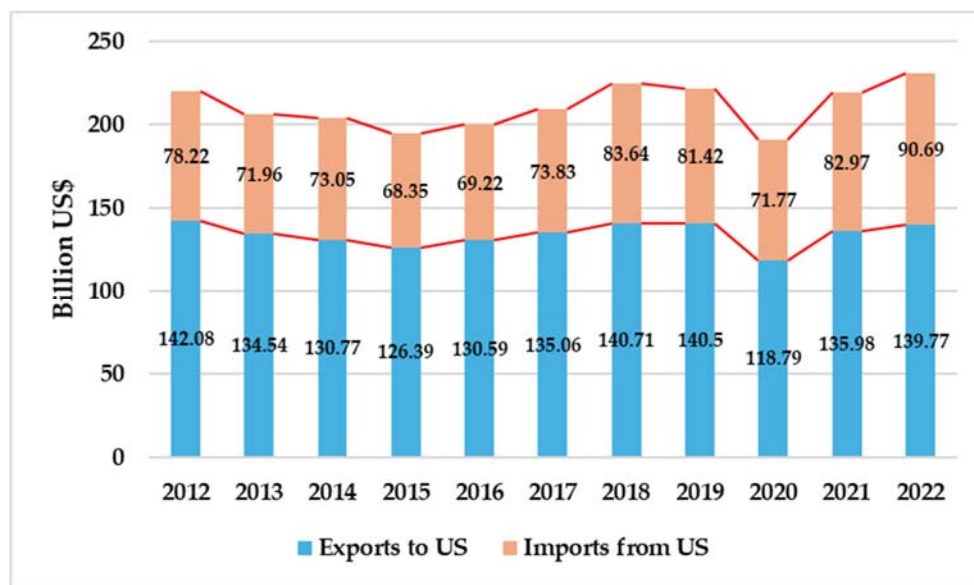


Image 1. Graph showcasing the trade relations (imports and exports) between Japan and the US (2012-2022)

In addition, Trump consistently emphasized the necessity for Japan to increase its contribution to the costs of hosting US troops. The statement released prior to the G20 meeting in Osaka, 2019 is relevant: “If Japan is attacked, we will fight World War III [...] we will go in and protect them and fight with our lives and with our treasure. We will fight at all costs. But if we’re attacked, Japan doesn’t have to help us at all [...]. They can watch it on a Sony television, the attack”²⁴⁹. These ideas regarding the US-Japan security treaty had notable effects for the alliance

²⁴⁷ Numbers adapted from “Japan - Indicators”, *Trading Economics*, [https://tradingeconomics.com/japan/indicators], Accessed August 06, 2023.

²⁴⁸ Paul O’Shea and Sebastian Maslow, “‘Making the Alliance Even Greater’: (Mis-)Managing U.S.-Japan Relations in the Age of Trump”, *Asian Security* 17, no. 2, November 5, 2020, p. 2.

²⁴⁹ Gina Harkins, “Trump: If Japan Is Attacked, They Can Watch on Sony TVs While US Fights World War III”, *Military.com*, June 28, 2019, [https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/28/trump-if-japan-attacked-they-can-watch-sony-tvs-while-us-fights-world-war-iii.html], Accessed August 07, 2023.

and for the regional security dynamics. Moreover, another declaration made in 2017, during a visit in Japan showcases Trump's linkage between economic exchange and security provisions:

"The prime minister of Japan is going to be purchasing massive amounts of military equipment, as he should. [...] It's a lot of jobs for us and a lot of safety for Japan"²⁵⁰. The diminished global leadership showcased by the US and the fracture lines generated by the pandemic indicated an era of increased uncertainty, which pointed towards the fragility of solely relying on alliances for security. Accordingly, Japan's proactive approach towards its role in the regional and global stages was aimed at mitigating potential vulnerabilities generated by the expansion of a leaderless world. In this sense, several practical approaches can be identified. Foremost, in response to calls for increased expenditure and to certain instabilities in international politics, Japan has taken steps to enhance its military capabilities. Secondly, Tōkyō focused on diversifying and expanding its security partnerships beyond the US, by engaging in close cooperation with various actors. Thirdly, Japan has placed significant emphasis on strengthening regional institutions and frameworks for cooperation in order to address increasing security challenges and instability.

3.2. Redefining Security Dynamics: Japan's Expanding Partnerships and Changing Perceptions

The concept of proactive diplomacy has a certain history attached to it in Japanese collective consciousness. Developed in 2013 in the first National Security Strategy (NSS), 'Proactive Contribution to Peace' became a fundamental foreign policy norm attached to the Abe administrations (December 2012 – September 2020). The 2013 NSS explicitly indicated the necessity of strengthening national capabilities and of expanding its regional role as a pillar of stability. The purpose for Tōkyō was "to realize an international order and security environment that are desirable for Japan, by playing an even more proactive role in achieving peace, stability, and prosperity of the international community"²⁵¹. This strategy complemented the already-developed value-oriented diplomacy highlighted in 2006-2007 alongside the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity', which translated in the promotion of universal values, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law²⁵².

These initiatives indicated a trend in Japanese foreign policy: an increased presence in the regional framework. As indicated by the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy (FIOP), the regional context (Indo-Pacific) became a fundamental pillar in Japanese initiatives. Developing and maintaining cooperative and strategic relations with Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been a top priority for the Japanese government in order to limit China's regional influence and provide stability. These relations "if properly developed, can and should serve as one of Japan's most important diplomatic pillars to promote liberal, open and rule-based regional

²⁵⁰ Mark Landler and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, "Trump Tells Japan It Can Protect Itself by Buying U.S. Arms", *The New York Times*, November 6, 2017, [<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/06/world/asia/trump-japan-shinzo-abe.html>], Accessed August 8, 2023.

²⁵¹ "National Security Strategy", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, December 2013, p. 14.

²⁵² Taro Aso, "On the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity'", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 2007.

integration in Asia”²⁵³. Apart from promoting certain norms highlighted in the value-oriented diplomacy, such as defending free trade, peaceful tension resolutions and an intra-regional cooperation based on trust, the relationship with ASEAN established an efficient mechanism of maintaining stability and the status-quo. Throughout history, Japan has bilaterally and multilaterally developed the relations with ASEAN states, conducting numerous financial aid programs through the ODA. In this sense, Japan provided financial assistance to Southeast Asia for more than 60 years, and between 1960 and 2011, 34.9% of Tōkyō’s ODA funds had been directed to ASEAN countries²⁵⁴.

3.2.1. Regional, Human and Social Security

A leaderless world prompted instability in various non-traditional facets of security, namely human and social security. In the face of the significant global turmoil generated by the pandemic, Japan’s commitment to regional stability and collective crisis management came forth through its involvement in various initiatives aimed at mitigating disruptions. Moreover, Tōkyō’s response was a multifaceted one, with solutions ranging from capacity building to promoting economic recovery. Foremost, the ASEAN Center for Public Health Emergency and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) had been established with consistent Japanese support (both in terms of financial aid and operational support)²⁵⁵. Aside from the 49.8 million US\$ invested in May 2020 for the operationalization of the project, Japan has provided “training for health officers of ASEAN countries in cooperation with experts from various regions and organizations”²⁵⁶. Complementing these aspects related to capacity-building, ACPHEED also encouraged crisis management knowledge-sharing, facilitating information flows and best practices in pandemic response. Secondly, other significant support came through the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, as Japan, China and the Republic of Korea redirected funds from the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) platform²⁵⁷. Moreover, this financial aid was also directed at developing technical expertise to support medical research institutions. Thirdly, the Japan International Cooperation Agency’s (JICA) Initiative on Overseas Loan and Investment for ASEAN was aimed at mobilizing approximately 3 billion US\$ from the public and private sectors over the course of three years to address economic deficiencies prompted by the pandemic. These efforts were also complemented through the Japan – ASEAN Economic Resilience Plan, developed in July 2020. Overall, such initiatives restated Japan’s identity as a regional leader, being focused on diversifying supply chains, developing technologies and stimulating economic recovery. These norms-based platforms also illustrate Japan’s ability to navigate complex crisis scenarios, while also showcasing its interests to harness partnerships for the well-being of the region as a whole.

²⁵³ Ken Jimbo, “Japan-Southeast Asia Relations: Implication of US Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific Region”, in Yuki Tatsumi (ed.), *Japan’s Foreign Policy Challenges in East Asia: Views from the Next Generation*, Washington DC: Stimson, 2014, p. 53

²⁵⁴ “History of Japan’s ODA Ties with ASEAN”, JICA’S World, September 2013, p.11.

²⁵⁵ “Fact Sheet: Major Examples of Japan’s COVID-19 related Support towards ASEAN”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 27, 2021.

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

²⁵⁷ “Overview of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation”, ASEAN Secretariat Information Paper, May 2023.

3.2.2. Traditional Security

Moving on to traditional security, Japan and ASEAN have been engaged in numerous security-related platforms and exercises. Since 2013, when the NSS was developed, Tōkyō focused on expanding its security assets and “by applying a dual-track approach of US alliance consolidation and alliance diversification, Japan has ‘decentered’ and ‘decoupled’ its security interests from the US while ensuring sustained US commitment to the region”²⁵⁸. In addition to this approach towards the US, Japan has pursued various regional initiatives that exhibit its presence in the regional framework. Japan has fostered significant security-motivated partnerships within the Asia-Pacific. The changes in regional power dynamics, accentuated by the proliferation of a leaderless world, prompted Tōkyō to emphasize its commitment to the FIOP. Basically, “[i]n response to the rise of China and India and declining US influence, Japan has prescribed the need for new security partnerships and the expansion of Tokyo’s role in shaping the Asia-Pacific”²⁵⁹. The Indo-Pacific encompasses vast and significant strategic areas, such as the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, South-East Asia and the Pacific Ocean. In addition, the increased interest for the Indo-Pacific concept “is a natural outcome that not only clearly reflects the strategic relevance of Asia, but also echoes the critical importance Indo-Pacific sea lanes bear in global trade and energy security in the 21st century”²⁶⁰. Japan’s proactive approach reaches beyond conventional challenges, by addressing emerging threats to ensure the region’s stable environment. A key initiative that complements the FIOP is the Vientiane Vision 2.0²⁶¹. At its core, Vientiane 2.0 exhibits three areas of cooperation: upholding the rule of law, enhancing maritime security and creating a common platform for addressing regional challenges. In alignment with the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM-Plus) agenda and practical cooperation platforms, Vientiane 2.0 encompasses a set of objectives aimed at enhancing regional security capabilities. Foremost, it seeks to facilitate knowledge-sharing and alignment with international norms and practices, fostering common values among ASEAN and Japan. Accordingly, this initiative involves active Japanese support for ASEAN’s efforts at strengthening its defense ability. This includes the deployment of Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) personnel to Southeast Asia and other reciprocal exchanges that augment a collaborative environment.

Secondly, the fundamental area of cooperation highlighted throughout Vientiane 2.0 is maritime security. Tōkyō’s interest for maritime security developed somewhat naturally, given the transformations on the regional stage. Southeast Asia, South China Sea and East China Sea became complex environments of international politics mainly due to the expanding nature of disputes. Accordingly, challenges range from territorial and maritime claims to Great Power

²⁵⁸ Sebastian Maslow, “Japan’s ‘Pivot to Asia’: Tokyo Discovers the Indo-Pacific”, *Policy Forum*, August 1, 2018, <https://www.policyforum.net/japans-pivot-asia/>. Accessed August 09, 2023.

²⁵⁹ *Ibidem*. Accessed June 15, 2023.

²⁶⁰ Jon Elizagaray Iglesias, “Japan’s Values-based Diplomacy & The Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision”, Dissertation, University of the Basque Country, p. 18.

²⁶¹ “Updating the ‘Vientiane Vision: Japan’s Defense Cooperation Initiative with ASEAN’”, Japan Ministry of Defense, November 2019.

competition²⁶². For Japan, the freedom of navigation in these sea lanes is a fundamental strategic interest for its survival. Manicom²⁶³ identified four significant threats that could jeopardize Japan's reliance on these sea routes: historical factors that generate a competitive environment, Japan's absolute dependence on trade activities (present on its security agenda), piracy and the rise of China. In this sense, it becomes clear that Japan manifests a high interest in upholding norms to effectively address maritime disputes. By fostering collaboration within multilateral platforms (such as Vientiane 2.0), Tōkyō recognizes the significance of such security frameworks in promoting regional stability.

While Japan has indeed focused on bolstering its regional and global presence through various partnerships, there are critics who argue that these actions do not align with its rhetoric of promoting values-based diplomacy. Subsequently, Japan at times employs “a values-free diplomacy of pragmatism and expediency, dealing with regional governments as they are, not as one might wish them to be”²⁶⁴. In the case of regional partners, Japan has faced substantial criticism for not taking a more assertive stance against Chinese human rights abuses, especially in relation to the treatment of the Uyghur minority in Xianjing. This unexpected tolerance is influenced by the fact that “Tokyo does not want to risk maintaining good ties and strategic interests for the sake of promoting democratic values and civil liberties”²⁶⁵. Accordingly, Japan's reluctance to take a harder stance on human rights issues, such as the case of the Uyghur minority, can be attributed to certain economic and strategic interests. Beijing is an economic powerhouse, being one of Japan's largest trade partners. Japan has tried to diversify several supply chains; however, this dependency remains high.

Moreover, there are geopolitical considerations at play. Adopting an overly confrontational approach could actually impact the delicate geopolitical balance. While Tōkyō's international decisions involve a rather sensitive demarcation between strategic interests on the one hand, and democratic values on the other, it is paramount to highlight that Japanese foreign policy is not entirely devoid of such values. Japan's commitment to democracy and human rights is visible through its status of significant international donor (such as its involvement in the United Nations Development Programme – UNDP) and through its technical and financial assistance to developing countries aimed at strengthening democratic institutions. Japan's approach manifests a pragmatic element; however, it still upholds fundamental values enshrined in the FIOP. Overall, Japan's commitments to various security-driven partnerships in the regional context actually reflect its recognition of the complex relation between traditional and non-traditional security concerns. Regional stability hinges not only on military strength, but also on

²⁶² Nguyen Hung Son, “ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership in Southeast Asia: Maritime Security and Cooperation”, in Rizal Sukma and Yoshihide Soeya (eds.), *Beyond 2015: ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership for Democracy, Peace, and Prosperity in Southeast Asia*, Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2013, p. 218.

²⁶³ James Manicom, “Japan's Role in Strengthening Maritime Security in Southeast Asia”, *Maritime Security in South East Asia: US, Japan, Regional and Industry Strategies*, NBR Special Report #24, November 2010, cited in Nguyen Hung Son, *art. cit.*, p. 219.

²⁶⁴ Jeff Kingston, “The Emptiness of Japan's Values Diplomacy in Asia”, *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, vol 18, issue 19, no. 1, October 2020, p. 1.

²⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

various other criteria. This holistic perspective showcases that maintaining security in the Indo-Pacific requires addressing the multiplicity of interconnected challenges.

4. Japan's Diplomatic Dilemmas: Crimea 2014 vs. Ukraine 2022

The Russian invasion of Ukraine represents a political turning point on the international stage. Despite its regionalized nature, its effects go beyond Europe, impacting, on the one hand the Asian continent, and the stage of world politics on the other hand. As clearly stated in the 2022 Diplomatic Bluebook, the Russian invasion “constitutes a challenge to the fundamental principles of the international community that unilateral change of the status quo by force is unacceptable, and threatens the post-Cold War world order”²⁶⁶. Japan's reaction actually highlights the changes and shifts in Tōkyō's diplomatic posture, especially related to values-oriented diplomacy. As a phenomenon whose effects endanger the global norms-based order, “[t]he Japanese government sees Putin's assault on Ukraine as proof that authoritarian powers are on the march. They fear that a Russian victory in Ukraine could embolden China in their region”²⁶⁷. In order to comprehensively assess the changes in Japan's attitude towards Russia's actions, the paper focuses on a comparative analysis of Tōkyō's responses towards the annexation of Crimea in 2014 vs the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

4.1. The Annexation of Crimea and Japan's Cautious Response - 2014

In the context of the Crimean crisis, Japan's posture on the international stage was marked primarily by caution. The late acceptance of imposing sanctions on Russia was contingent on constant US pressure. Naturally, given that its “longstanding alliance with the U.S. affects the country's energy and foreign policy choices, it was not surprising that Japan joined the sanctions regime post-Ukraine”²⁶⁸. However, this stance coexisted with a parallel diplomatic agenda aimed at addressing various bilateral issues, such as territorial disputes and economic cooperation. Moreover, “the fact that the sanctions against Russia were intentionally limited [...] can be seen as sending the message that Japan does not intend to damage Russia economically, and that it views Russia as important”²⁶⁹. This aspect is further reinforced through the counterintuitive nature of some restrictions, such as the weapons embargo – as arms exports to Russia were null (and as Japan even nowadays continues to maintain thorough arms-export policies). Moreover, Abe Shinzō highlighted Japan's stance in a speech before the Diet in 2016: “I will resolve the territorial issue, end the abnormal situation in which no peace treaty has been concluded even 71 years after the war and cultivate the major possibility of Japan-Russia cooperation in areas such

²⁶⁶ “Diplomatic Bluebook 2022: Japanese Diplomacy and International Situation in 2021”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, p. 13.

²⁶⁷ Gideon Rachman, “China, Japan and the Ukraine War”, *Financial Times*, March 27, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/9aa4df57-b457-4f2d-a660-1e646f96c8cb>. Accessed September 23, 2023.

²⁶⁸ Wrenn Yennie-Lindgren, “New Dynamics in Japan–Russia Energy Relations 2011–2017”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 9, no. 2, 2018, p. 5.

²⁶⁹ Daisuke Kitade, “Considering the Effects of Japanese Sanctions against Russia”, *Mitsui Global Strategic Studies Institute Monthly Report*, July 2016, p. 2.

as the economy and energy”²⁷⁰. This declaration preceded the 2016 Onsen Summit, a series of diplomatic meetings between Abe and Putin in Yamaguchi, Japan. This series of humiliating efforts on the Japanese side yielded no tangible progress in addressing contentious topics, despite Tōkyō’s optimism. Consequently, Japan’s engagement with Russia was based on several key elements. Foremost, Russia represented a consistent supply of energy resources from Japan. Due to economic pragmatism, the energy sector played a significant strategic role in Japan-Russia relations and, thus, Japan was cautious not to jeopardize these economic interests. Secondly, as highlighted through the Onsen Summit, Japan’s diplomatic approach was also meant to attain or at least to bring forth the issue of sovereignty over the Northern Territories. Lastly, Tōkyō assumed that fostering multiple diplomatic channels with Russia might mitigate closer ties between Moscow and Beijing. Japan’s reaction to the Crimean crisis was mostly characterized by a delicate balancing act between aligning with its allies (which also included upholding international rules) and economic and strategic interests, reflecting the complexity of its relations with Russia. However, on the long run, such a perspective proved deficient. As Japan faced more assertive and evolving regional and global dynamics, it was compelled to reassess its foreign policy stance.

4.2. The War in Ukraine and Japan’s Changing Role in the World – 2022

Since the start of the war, Japan has consistently shown strong support for Ukraine. On Day 1 (February 24, 2022), Prime Minister Kishida, in an untraditional manner, stated that the invasion “has rocked the foundation of the international order that rejects changing the existing conditions unilaterally and by force”²⁷¹. Subsequently, Tōkyō displayed an uncommon alignment with its G7 allies, closely coordinating in imposing a wide range of sanctions, ranging from financial measures (asset freezes of Russian banks) and trade restrictions to individual bans. In addition, Japan has been providing a wide range of supportive measures, from financial and humanitarian assistance, to non-lethal logistic equipment and diplomatic support. In March 2023, Kishida visited Kyiv, placing in spotlight Japan’s symbolic role as the leading Asian state in support of Ukraine. Moreover, he pledged that “Japan will keep aiding Ukraine with the greatest effort to regain peace”²⁷², message delivered in contrast to the Xi-Putin meeting of March 2023.

Nonetheless, the normative effect of the war in Ukraine brought forth towards public perception the fragility of the global security environment. In this sense, it prompted shifts in the Japanese collective consciousness. Traditionally, Japan is perceived as a soft power superpower that manifests two types of deficits in relation to its hard power: capability deficits and legitimacy

²⁷⁰ Cited in Linda Sieg and Nobuhiro Kubo, “Japan’s Abe Seeks Breakthrough with Russia on Long-Disputed Islands”, *Reuters*, September 28, 2016, [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-russia-disputed-islands-idUSKCN11Y1AU>], Accessed September 23, 2023.

²⁷¹ “Kishida Slams ‘invasion,’ Vows to Consider More Tough Sanctions: The Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis”, *The Asahi Shimbun*, February 24, 2022, [<https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14556852>], Accessed September 25, 2023.

²⁷² “Kishida Tells Zelenskyy G-7 Will Stay United on Ukraine Support”, *Nikkei Asia*, March 21, 2023, [<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Ukraine-war/Kishida-tells-Zelenskyy-G-7-will-stay-united-on-Ukraine-support>], Accessed September 25, 2023.

deficits²⁷³. On the one hand, drawing from several post-World War II restraints, the capacity deficit has been mostly generated through the strict interpretation of Article 9, as the Japanese Constitution controlled the mandate of the Japan Self-Defense Forces' (JSDF). However, in the last years, Japan's military spending continuously increased, even going beyond the symbolic barrier of 1% of GDP, while Tōkyō assumed a more proactive role on the regional and global stages of politics. On the other hand, the legitimacy deficit is mostly related to public perceptions of the constitution and of Japan's role on the international stage. The war in Ukraine practically shook public perception, aspects indicated especially through the 2022 JSDF survey²⁷⁴.

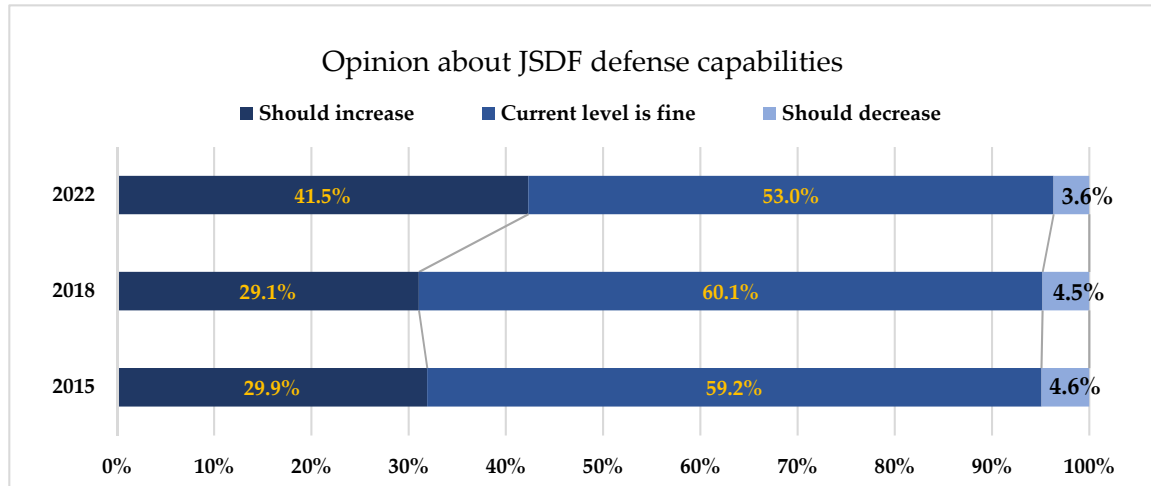


Image 2. Japan's Cabinet Office – Opinion Polls on JSDF and Defense Issues (2015, 2018, 2022)

The war served as a catalyst in triggering a change of public perception. With supporters of increasing capabilities hovering around 30% (with a small decline from 2015 to 2018), the figure significantly increased to 41.5% in 2022. Moreover, another survey conducted in 2022 showcased, for the first time in recent years, that more Japanese people expressed support rather than opposition to Japan taking an extended role in the security alliance with the US²⁷⁵. In 2022, 49% of respondents were in favour of an expanded role in the alliance, while 46% were against it. This marks a reversal of the trend, as in 2020 only 41% of respondents were in favour, with 53% against, while in 2021 46% were in favour with 49% against. The statistics actually underscore the impact of the war in Ukraine and the broader, more general shifts in global security dynamics on the Japanese collective consciousness.

²⁷³ Takashi Inoguchi and Paul Bacon, "Japan's Emerging Role as a 'Global Ordinary Power'", *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 6, no. 1, 2006: p. 11.

²⁷⁴ Data has been centralized from "「自衛隊・防衛問題に関する世論調査」の概要 平成30年3月" [Overview of 'Public Opinion Poll on Self-Defense Forces and Defense Issues – March 2018], Japan Cabinet Office, 2018 and "「自衛隊・防衛問題に関する世論調査」の概要 令和5年3月" [Overview of 'Public Opinion Poll on Self-Defense Forces and Defense Issues – March 2022], Japan Cabinet Office, 2022.

²⁷⁵ Miki Okuyama, "More Japanese Want Bigger Role in U.S. Security Alliance: Poll", *Nikkei Asia*, January 24, 2023, [https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/More-Japanese-want-bigger-role-in-U.S.-security-alliance-poll], Accessed September 26, 2023.

Despite the fact that these changes in public perception are tangible, it is fundamental to note that they are not definitive. All these statistics indicate that, while there is a discernible and palpable shift in favour of Japan's increased role on the stage of global politics (including enhancing its military capabilities to overcome a capacity deficit), they are not an overwhelming consensus among the population. The dynamics of global politics certainly prompted a re-evaluation of these principles, but they have not led (yet) to a complete departure from Japan's historical stance on security and political issues. Nonetheless, the ongoing debates and transformations within society and policymakers underscore the complexity of Japan's evolving security landscape.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the paper focused on the normative implications of Japan's crisis management and foreign policy strategies as they intersected with three significant global events. Fundamentally, Japan's multi-faceted approaches to diplomacy as exemplified through its responses to these moments of crisis also illustrate the delicate balance between material and ideational considerations in the field of international relations. In the case of the multilateralist skepticism of the Trump administration and the challenges in cooperation brought by the pandemic, Japan's evolving strategies and increasing engagement on the regional and global stages represent compelling evidence of Japan's changing role in the world. Far from being perfect, the aspects presented actually underscore Tōkyō's willingness to shape international norms. A similar conclusion can be drawn from Japan's response to the war in Ukraine. Japan's change from a historically passive actor to a more proactive player in global politics also highlights the growing complexities of the modern world. Nonetheless, several limitations to such an argument persist, as Japan also manifests a pragmatic approach rooted in its strategic interests. As Japan continues to redefine its role and identity in world politics (as well as harmonize internal changes), it remains a pivotal actor in the world order.

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Carrie Lam's 2019-2020 Communication Strategy: a Failure of Democratic Governing

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Abstract

Two decades after the handover to mainland China, Hong Kong struggles with the socio-economic and political integration into the Chinese polity, tension which culminated in 2019-2020, when the region witnessed the largest public demonstrations in its recent history. As Chief Executive, Carrie Lam's strategy for crisis communication was crucial for mitigating the conflict, while her approach lacked transparency and proved to be a failure for Hong Kong's democratic practices.

Keywords: discourse analysis, strategic communication, 2019-2020 protests, Hong Kong, Carrie Lam

Introduction and Methodology

The "one country, two systems" approach to governing special administrative regions proved increasingly unstable in the case of Hong Kong as China's authoritarian tendencies escalated at the end of the 2010s. Cumulating a plethora of economic, social, and political factors, the growing influence of the mainland in the HKSAR is a phenomenon well documented in literature²⁷⁶. However, the power dynamic and resistance tactics changed in 2019 as Hong Kong saw the largest protests in the history of the region, as a reaction first to the legislative initiative in the form of extradition laws to China, then mutating to an overall reaction against authoritarianism, police abuses and the mainland influence on the polis²⁷⁷. Amid the over two million people protesting, the task of Chief Executive Carrie Lam proved particularly burdensome, as a pawn succumbing to the pressure of two masters, the people of Hong Kong and of Beijing²⁷⁸. Lam's communication strategy in this time of crisis proved vital in stabilizing an increasingly dissatisfied population, in addition to managing the inevitable transition into China, with all that entails: losing Hong Kong's autonomy in favour of adopting the mainland bureaucratic system and institutions, particularly the police state, as well as the legislation necessary for integrating the region in the mainland polity, such as the extradition laws. The

²⁷⁶ Ping, Yew Chiew, and Kwong Kin-ming. "Hong Kong Identity on the Rise", *Asian Survey*, vol. 54, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1088–112, JSTOR, [https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2014.54.6.1088], Accessed 8 September 2023.

²⁷⁷ Francis L. F. Lee et al. "Hong Kong's Summer of Uprising: From Anti-Extradition to Anti-Authoritarian Protests", *China Review*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2019, pp. 1–32, JSTOR, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/26838911], Accessed 9 September 2023.

²⁷⁸ "The Chief Executive 'has to serve two masters' – HK Leader Carrie Lam – transcript", *Reuters*, 12 September 2019, [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-lam-transcript-excl-idUSKCN1VX0P7], Accessed 24 July 2023.

failure of Lam's approach would not only mean her replacement with a Chief Executive closer to Chinese interests but also the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy. In this respect, it is imperative to assess the degree to which Lam's crisis communication was accomplished from a PR perspective, as well as its consequences on the development of the 2019-2020 protests.

Considering the previous context, the main research question of this paper is "How has Carrie Lam's communication strategy influenced the outcome of the 2019-2020 protests in Hong Kong?". One can assess its success by analysing the conditions that led to the protests, the authorities handling of the incidents, and, most critically, Carrie Lam's communication strategy in the form of her addresses, press statements, and attending several events together with other authority figures such as the police or other legislators. With this purpose in mind, the main methodology employed in this paper focuses on qualitative sources, namely analyzing the discourse of nineteen of Lam's addresses between the beginning of the protests (early June 2019) and their end (July 2020). In the frame of this year, Lam's message transgressed from informative to asking for dialogue, to eventually a de facto policy and the condemnation of the protesters. However, these sources are interpreted from a quantitative perspective as well, since there is an analysis of the most common and least common terms employed. There are more than nine thousand words in the nineteen addresses, and an SEO tool is used for tracking the most and least common terms. Furthermore, other qualitative sources used are historical and political evolutions, pieces of legislation, mostly the Basic Law and National Security Law, and representation of the events in media. The structure of the paper follows an analysis of the conditions leading to the protests and the development of the conflict, continuing with a breakdown of the main six characteristics of Lam's communication strategy, and ending with the discourse analysis of Lam's addresses and its implications for the outcome of the conflict.

The protests

Starting with the 1997 handover, Hong Kong's status as an autonomous region was in peril, as the interventions from the mainland became more conspicuous. The tightening of economic partnerships and dependency on the mainland in the last two decades significantly reduced Hong Kong's political autonomy. It is well known that the region has never been a full democracy, since the British colonial system allowed little concessions via political representativeness, and even those came at the end of the colonial period via limited voting²⁷⁹. While Hongkongers enjoyed democratic human rights, such as those of free speech, publication, and assembly guaranteed by the Basic Law, the issue of political representativeness stagnated due to the structure of governing bodies, making the region a "semi-democracy"²⁸⁰. The Executive Council is comprised of two parts, that of geographical constituencies for which citizens can vote, and that of functional or professional constituencies, that are occupied by the professional sectors

²⁷⁹ John P. Burns, "Hong Kong in 1992: Struggle for Authority", *Asian Survey*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1993, pp. 22-31, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/2645283], Accessed 19 August 2023.

²⁸⁰ Ngok Ma, "Civil Society and Democratization in Hong Kong Paradox and Duality", *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Volume 4, No.2, 2008, p. 162.

and cannot be voted for by the public²⁸¹. As a result of the economic entanglement, these representatives often have relations with the mainland, thus, resulting in the lack of full political representation. Additionally, despite the fact that Basic Law vows to introduce universal suffrage in art. 45: “The ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures”²⁸², at the time of the protests, this was an unresolved issue, which remained a congestion point with the local authorities.

Furthermore, one central issue regarding the growing tension between the two actors is that of identity. From a constructivist perspective, identity is created in relation to the other²⁸³, a “production of difference and exclusion”; hence, Hongkongers' identity is created apart from the mainland one, and, despite sharing the ethnic element, there are several markers of differentiation, such as the degree of social freedom enjoyed, the linguistic element and attitudes toward the communist regime²⁸⁴. The distancing from the mainland polity comes as no surprise considering the pro-democratic attitudes of Hongkongers, as well as the fact that, for several generations, mainlanders who fled communist China took refuge in the economically prosperous Hong Kong²⁸⁵. Therefore, data collected by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (hereafter HKPORI) shows that identification with China is increasingly less common, particularly among the younger generation, the catalyst for the 2019-2020 protests²⁸⁶. The distrust regarding the opaque, corrupt even, mainland justice system made the 2019 news a starting point for conflict: by announcing the introduction of the extradition bills, the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance, and The Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance, Carrie Lam was faced with backlash from the civil society and, eventually, with the largest protests in the history of the region.

A general timeline of the protests shows that the public demonstrations started early in 2019, however, the trigger that catalysed most of the population came in June, particularly June 9 and 12, when over two million people took to the streets to protest the extradition bill. The following months up to the spring of 2020 showed increasing numbers of protesters from all age groups, education backgrounds, and career sectors, as more than a million people joined monthly. As the conflict grew, the administration did not seem to acknowledge the demands of the people, hence the tactics of protesting became more diverse and radical, and conflict with the police ensued. Consequently, the point of focus for the protesters switched from just the extradition bill to an overall reaction against the governing ills, police abuses, lack of political representation,

²⁸¹ “The Structure of the Legislative Council”, [https://www.legco.gov.hk/en/about-legco/overview-and-composition.html], Accessed 8 July 2023.

²⁸² *The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China*, 1997, [https://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclaw/chapter4.html], Accessed 6 July 2023.

²⁸³ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs an Identity?”, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, London: Sage, 1996, p. 4.

²⁸⁴ Ping 2014, *op. cit.*

²⁸⁵ Sam Wong, “Historical and Cultural Contexts of Mainland Chinese Migrants in Hong Kong”, *Exploring “Unseen” Social Capital in Community Participation: Everyday Lives of Poor Mainland Chinese Migrants in Hong Kong*, Amsterdam University Press, 2007, pp. 73–96, JSTOR, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt45kfdv.7], Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.

²⁸⁶ Categorical Ethnic Identity – “Hongkonger in broad sense” (by age group), HKPORI, 2023, [https://www.pori.hk/pop-poll/ethnic-identity-en/q001-broadhongkonger.html?lang=en], Accessed 10 September 2023.

and lack of economic opportunity, especially for younger people²⁸⁷. The protesters formulated the Five Demands, as follows: withdrawal of the extradition bill; retraction of the word “riot” to describe the protests; release of all arrested demonstrators; independent inquiry into police brutality; universal suffrage²⁸⁸. Of these five, only the withdrawal of the bill was achieved during the protests.

Carrie Lam’s communication strategy

The Chief Executive’s response to the growing instability, conflict, and demands of the people has been criticized by activists and journalists for not following a suitable communication strategy²⁸⁹. To grasp the propriety of Carrie Lam’s crisis communication, it is imperative to address six core characteristics of her strategy, together with the effects it produced on the conflict’s outcome. Any PR strategy must follow three stages: the preparation and research before the conflict, by anticipating the public’s reactions; during the conflict, by appeasing and attempting to solve the reputation damage, and the stage after the conflict, to ensure that the aftermath leaves an as positive image as possible among the public²⁹⁰. In this light is Lam’s strategy analyzed by dividing it into six aspects.

Firstly, there was no anticipation of the public’s reaction to the extradition laws, which is significant considering the identity differentiation and distrust of mainland authorities. According to 2019 data from HKPORI, in the year of the extradition law proposal, only 25% of Hongkongers stated a positive opinion regarding the mainland government, which translates to a general distrust of the Chinese judicial system²⁹¹. The reaction against the extradition bill is to be expected as people do not trust getting a fair trial on the mainland, and as tales of the abuses and violence of mainland prisons circulated among protesters. Therefore, Lam’s administration showed signs of groupthink, as there was no prior campaign to prepare the public to receive the legislation. Furthermore, this shows the societal disconnect from the mainland, as Hongkongers detach themselves socially and politically from a tightly integrated judicial system in favor of local autonomy.

Secondly, one of the most relevant aspects of a communication plan is answering quickly, ensuring transparency, and clearing misunderstandings as they happen. One of Lam’s most condemnable missteps is that of making appearances days after conflicts ensued, leaving plenty of time for protesters to conduct themselves with no public answer. This is crucial, particularly at

²⁸⁷ Lee 2019, *op. cit.*

²⁸⁸ Tsui-Kai Wong, “Hong Kong protests: What are the ‘five demands’? What do protesters want?”, *South China Morning Post*, 2019, [https://www.scmp.com/yp/discover/news/hong-kong/article/3065950/hong-kong-protests-what-are-five-demands-what-do], Accessed 10 September 2023.

²⁸⁹ Arun Sudhaman, “Carrie Lam’s Disastrous PR Strategy Steers Hong Kong Into Perilous Waters”, *PRovoke Media*, 2019, [https://www.provokemedia.com/long-reads/article/carrie-lam%27s-disastrous-pr-strategy-steers-hong-kong-into-perilous-waters], Accessed 10 September 2023.

²⁹⁰ Jennifer Schlueter, “Hong Kong’s Carrie Lam: Behind Her Communications Missteps”, *LinkedIn*, 2019, [https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/hong-kongs-carrie-lam-behind-her-communications-jennifer-schlueter/], Accessed 15 September 2023.

²⁹¹ “Appraisal of the Mainland China Government”, *HKPORI*, 2023, [https://www.pori.hk/pop-poll/feeling-towards-different-governments-en/v003.html?lang=en], Accessed 15 August 2023.

the beginning of the conflict, as despite suspending the extradition bill, Lam did not facilitate a dialogue with the public, to address their dissatisfaction. Instead, this provided the time and space for rumours to circulate and anxieties to grow. For instance, June 9 was the first large procession, with over one million participants. Lam did not leave space for dialogue before the protests and reacted only afterward in a matter that did not acknowledge the complaints raised. Moreover, despite suspending the bill on June 15 due to strong opposition, over two million people took to the streets on June 16. It was only on June 18 that Lam made a public apology and showed signs of concession, more than ten days after the first major protest. Between these two points in time, Law admitted her failure in transparently addressing the people's concerns, proving the failure or lack of a strategic communication plan: "I have to admit that our explanation and communication work has not been sufficient or effective"²⁹².

The third characteristic worth commenting on is that of the change in political narrative from the authorities' side. Lee comments on how "most of the pro-democracy struggle in Hong Kong concentrates on taking ownership of the political narrative"²⁹³, which is something that Lam's cabinet tried unsuccessfully. At the beginning of the timeline, namely early summer of 2019, Lam stressed that "people and organisations that have expressed their views in a peaceful and rational manner, even if they do not support the bill"²⁹⁴, with an emphasis on the legitimacy of their rational complaints. This has been a characteristic of her earlier speeches, as in her September address she mentions her opening to dialogue: "Many would say that we need a common basis to start such a dialogue, and that this has to start with the Chief Executive. I now present four actions to initiate this dialogue"²⁹⁵. However, as the conflict escalated, the rational manner of addressing complaints and being open to dialogue transformed into a narrative of the given, of facts and structures of power being unchangeable, supporting the status quo to the detriment of the people's requests. Lam's narrative excuses the authority abuses, particularly those of the police, by claiming that action is necessary to curb the protests and keep Hong Kong safe, by stressing phrases such as "law and order", in "As a responsible government, we have to maintain law and order"²⁹⁶, or "The Government will be resolute in maintaining law and order in Hong Kong and restoring confidence"²⁹⁷. It is crucial to underline the extent to which Lam's discourses stressed the idea of an immovable "rule of law", which comes against resolving the complaints raised by the people. This furthers a punitive approach rather than a collaborative one, stating for instance that "whatever we do is in the overall public interest of Hong Kong"²⁹⁸.

²⁹² "Hong Kong suspends fugitive bill work", *Hong Kong Government News*, 15 June 2019, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/06/20190615/20190615_151123_795.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

²⁹³ Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "International Lobbying for Hong Kong", *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, vol. 33, no. 1/2, 2020, pp. 108, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/27003438], Accessed 10 September 2023.

²⁹⁴ "Hong Kong suspends fugitive bill work", *Hong Kong Government News*, 15 June 2019, https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/06/20190615/20190615_151123_795.html. Accessed 23 July 2023.

²⁹⁵ "CE delivers video address", *Hong Kong Government News*, 4 September 2019, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/09/20190904/20190904_171611_600.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

²⁹⁶ "Fugitive bill to be further clarified", *Hong Kong Government News*, 10 June 2019, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/06/20190610/20190610_122357_544.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

²⁹⁷ "Violent protests endanger Hong Kong", *Hong Kong Government News*, 5 August 2019, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/08/20190805/20190805_122432_769.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

²⁹⁸ "CE at a press conference", *Department of Justice*, 4 October 2019, [https://www.doj.gov.hk/en/community_engagement/press/20191004_pr2.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

What is more, it creates an undemocratic limit on public engagement in political affairs, by controlling the degree to which the status quo allows political intervention from the public under the guise of the rule of law: “So protest itself is an expression of freedoms and rights and opinions - if it is done in a legal way”²⁹⁹.

Moreover, a fourth characteristic of Lam’s communication strategy relates to the construction of a narrative in which not only is the administration praising the status quo but is actively delegitimizing the protests. One of the most evoked characterizations is that of violence and being violent, particularly related to young people, the core of the protests. By addressing the issue of violence and the chaos created during the conflict, Lam managed to alienate a large part of Hong Kong’s society. Encouraging people to stay away from the altercations, and to “say no to chaos and violence”³⁰⁰, Lam warned against the perceived “widespread disruptions and violence”, adding on the effects this has on the rest of the population, that “the great majority of Hong Kong people are now in a state of great anxiety”³⁰¹. It must be argued that by announcing the violence only concerning the protesters while refusing to admit the guilt and violence of the police officers involved, the Chief Executive created an environment in which protesters, particularly younger ones, are prone to radicalization.

Additionally, by emphasizing an “us versus them” approach, Lam managed to lose support and engage people who were previously politically apathetic. Most evidently, her depiction of young people as disruptive and violent led to the discrediting of a large part of civil society involved in the political landscape. This proves alarming considering the profile of the protesters as young, educated citizens: the large majority being under thirty-five years old and over eighty percent of them having at least a bachelor's degree³⁰². When not accusing them of being thugs, Lam used a condescending tone, proving concerned about their future prospects, considering their delinquent acts: “Many students are participating in these violent protests or even riots, jeopardising their safety and even their future”³⁰³, and stating that she is “very concerned about the large number of young people and students being involved in these violent protests and many of them being arrested”³⁰⁴.

Furthermore, the fifth characteristic refers to the narrative surrounding the police department and the use of force during the timeline. It can be argued that the police lost a significant part of public trust during the protests. From using excessive physical force, tear gas, and rubber bullets to not showing identification numbers and arbitrary detainment, there were

²⁹⁹ “Hong Kong freedoms assured: CE”, *Hong Kong Government News*, 26 May 2020, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2020/05/20200526/20200526_102413_504.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

³⁰⁰ “Violent protests endanger Hong Kong”, *Hong Kong Government News*, 5 August 2019, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/08/20190805/20190805_122432_769.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

³⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰² Lee Francis, *op. cit.*, pp.12-13.

³⁰³ “Government introduces anti-mask law”, *Hong Kong Government News*, 4 October 2019, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/10/20191004/20191004_165505_551.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

³⁰⁴ “CE at a press conference”, *Department of Justice*, 4 October 2019, [https://www.doj.gov.hk/en/community_engagement/press/20191004_pr2.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

hundreds of complaints against police misconduct³⁰⁵. As the public trust in authority and the police plummeted in 2019-2020, Carrie Lam's appraisal of the officers' conduct proved to be a misstep in amassing public sympathy. Not only did the Chief Executive not show empathy towards the victims of the police but complained in numerous instances of the physical and emotional turmoil the officers suffered, painting them as the real victims of the altercations. Lam encouraged the end of the protests not by addressing the Five Demands, but by "restoring calmness in society as soon as possible and avoiding any more injuries to law enforcement officers"³⁰⁶, stating that "Law and Order and media workers covering the incidents were injured"³⁰⁷, and offering "my support for all the law enforcement agencies in accordance with their policies, their rules, their guidelines"³⁰⁸. Lastly, on this point, Lam criticized "the harassment of police families, repeatedly going to the police quarters to do all sorts of threats and intimidation of police families, especially the young children"³⁰⁹, appealing to sympathy, particularly by evoking the young children, and proving insensitive to the losses suffered by the protesters, as well as losing the public's confidence.

The sixth and last notable communication aspect is the intentional opaqueness regarding the changes and integration into mainland China after the passing of the National Security Law. As the protests were impeded by the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions that followed, regarding both gathering in public spaces and wearing masks³¹⁰, the pressure from the public became weakened. Taking advantage of the restrictions and the societal chaos, Beijing passed the National Security Law that introduced four additional offenses punishable by life imprisonment in relation to the protests: secession, subversion, colluding with foreign forces, and terrorism, under the pretense of national security. As a result, any activity pertaining to protesting and protecting democratic practices was stopped. At the same time, Carrie Lam struggled to mitigate the crisis and convince the public that their freedoms were not further limited by this new piece of legislation. However, the distrust in both local and mainland authorities culminated in the summer of 2020, and Lam's lack of clarity in defending the National Security Law raised further concerns. She stressed the "need for national security. So rights and freedoms are not absolute. If we want to protect the majority of the people, then if the minority of the people - indeed a very small minority of people - are going to breach the law, to organise and participate in terrorist activities to subvert the state power, then of course they have to be bounded by the needed

³⁰⁵ "A Thematic Study by the IPCC on the Public Order Events arising from the Fugitive Offenders Bill since June 2019 and the Police Actions in Response", *Independent Police Complaints Council*, 2020, pp. 51-70, [https://www.ipcc.gov.hk/doc/en/report/thematic_report/Volume%201%20(CH1-CH4).pdf], Accessed 20 August 2023.

³⁰⁶ "Hong Kong suspends fugitive bill work", *Hong Kong Government News*, 15 June 2019, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/06/20190615/20190615_151123_795.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

³⁰⁷ "Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam apologises after extradition Bill protests", *CNA*, 18 June 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItIbg5k_8E&ab_channel=CNA], Accessed 23 July 2023.

³⁰⁸ "CE to ensure Hong Kong remains safe", *Hong Kong Government News*, 13 August 2019, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/08/20190813/20190813_122342_473.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

³⁰⁹ "Further violence not tolerated", *Hong Kong Government News*, August 27, 2019, [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/08/20190827/20190827_104230_671.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

³¹⁰ This is a remarkable situation in which the government abused colonial-era outdated legislation and forbade the wear of masks or any face covering that rendered protesters unable to be identified, which sparked debates about the abuse of power, only to install months later the obligation to wear masks due to Covid-19.

legislation”³¹¹. Nonetheless, by failing to quantify what a small minority of people means, she lost credibility by both proving to be Beijing’s puppet and sacrificing an undefined percentage of the population whose rights would be taken away due to protesting. While stating that “some of these human rights enjoyed by individuals under the international covenants are not absolute”³¹², Lam remained unclear on the full effect of the legislation for the public, as well as her mention that “rights to be exercised by the individuals could be restrained or regulated by law if it is for the purpose of protection of national security”³¹³ did not appease the protesters.

Discourse Analysis and Reactions

To further illustrate these characteristics of Lam’s communication strategy, it is imperative to analyse the most frequently employed terms in her nineteen addresses, to grasp their main points. The following table lists the most common terms used and some associated notions to them.

No.	Words/Phrases	Occurrences	Associations
1	Hong Kong	105	
2	Law	87	Extradition law/ NSL; Justification for crushing protests
3	Rule of Law	11	Cannot allow pardoning rioters
4	Government	41	To maintain the law
5	Security	40	National Security Law
6	Protest/protester	34	Connected to violence
7	Public	27	People, space
8	Violence/violent	33	Related to protesters
9	Police	25	Colleagues, family, kids
10	Order/law and order	21	Undermined
11	Safeguarding	19	Of national Security
12	Freedom	18	Assured by authorities/laws
13	Concern/concerned	17	About new legislation
14	Protect/protection	14	National Security
15	Legislation	14	Extradition law, "help to uphold justice"
16	Enforcement	13	Of legislation
17	Young people/student	13	Protesters/violence
18	Demand	13	The 5 demands
19	Dialogue	13	Between people and authorities

Table 1. The most frequently used words used in Lam’s addresses.

As previously discussed, this list provides a clear emphasis on authority and status quo to the detriment of the protesters via the guise of protecting society at large. It is essential to note the

³¹¹ “Hong Kong freedoms assured: CE”, *Hong Kong Government News*, 26 May 2020,

[https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2020/05/20200526/20200526_102413_504.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

³¹² “Press Releases after NSL”, *Department of Justice*, 1 July 2020, [https://www.doj.gov.hk/en/community_engagement/press/20200701_pr2.html], Accessed 23 July 2023.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

tone of these terms, as most word associations point to creating two sides at odds with each other, the government versus the protesters, with little space for reconciliation. By correlating the protesters with violence and chaos, while the police are revered as colleagues, Lam deepens this chasm that proves significant considering that over two million people out of seven million and a half joined the protests. Furthermore, another essential analysis is that of the least used relevant terms, as it can illustrate the lack of addressing pivotal notions during conflicts, such as communication, empathy, and the willingness to problem-solve. The second table shows some crucial terms that were omitted or hardly mentioned, together with their associated terms.

No.	Words/Phrases	Occurrences	Associations
1	Autonomy	0	
2	Unity	0	
3	Crisis	0	
4	Understanding	1	Mutual trust
5	Apology	1	Sincere, of Carrie Lam
6	Illegal	1	Acts (protests)
7	Trust	2	Between citizens and governing bodies
8	Divided/divide	2	HK society
9	Peaceful and rational manner	2	Expressing opinions, at the beginning of protests
10	Authority/Authorities	2	China
11	Respect	3	For freedoms/ people
12	Impartial/impartiality	3	Of Governing
13	Deficiency	4	Of Government/Justice System
14	China	5	Authority
15	Riot/rioter	6	Violent
16	Force	6	Authority, Police
17	Independence	7	Of governing bodies, illegal for Hong Kong
18	Legal	7	Framework through which protests should happen
19	Solution	8	To social/political problems

Table 2. The least frequently used words used in Lam's addresses.

As can be seen, there were hardly any positive terms mentioned, particularly relating to a divided society during public confrontations, such as "unity", "understanding", "apology", or "trust". Even when these types of terms were employed, their associations led against the demands of the people. For instance, when referring to "independence" Lam used the term not to describe Hong Kong's status, as per the demand of localist protesters, but to describe the status of the governing bodies, another point open to debate by the protesters due to their relation to the mainland.

These previous six characteristics are proof of an inefficient communication strategy that led to public distrust, uncertainty, and the rise of violence between protesters and the police. By answering days later to questions, remaining ambiguous on crucial matters, and not addressing

clearly the requests of the people, Lam lost most of its support both internally and from Beijing, as can be seen in her being replaced in the next term by John Lee. The reactions from protesters and fellow lawmakers did not show support for her actions and communication strategies. For instance, fellow politician Emily Lau stated regarding the Five Demands that “She is a walking disaster. She really did not respond to any of the demands”³¹⁴, while Freeman Yan, a protester, confessed that “It’s another bunch of rubbish. She cannot hoodwink people with one lie after another. I don’t feel any sincerity. I don’t trust her. She can always revive the bill in a repackaged form”³¹⁵. In addition, Bonnie Leung, the vice-convenor of the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF) stated that “We are very disappointed and angry. We do not accept Carrie Lam’s so-called apology”³¹⁶ referring to Lam’s attempt at apologizing for the misunderstandings at the beginning of the protests, while not changing any of the political conditions.

As a result, not only did Carrie Lam antagonize the increasingly politically active segment of Hong Kong’s society, but she also lost societal trust at large. The management of the conflict proved so disastrous that it reached the stage of involvement from Beijing via the National Security Law and her replacement as Chief Executive by John Lee in 2022, after delaying the Chief Executive elections by a year. Data from HKPORI polls conducted on over ten thousand people shows how Carrie Lam’s approval rate as head of the Legislative Council plummeted during the protests, going from 55.3% in 2018 to 23.8% at the end of 2019³¹⁷.

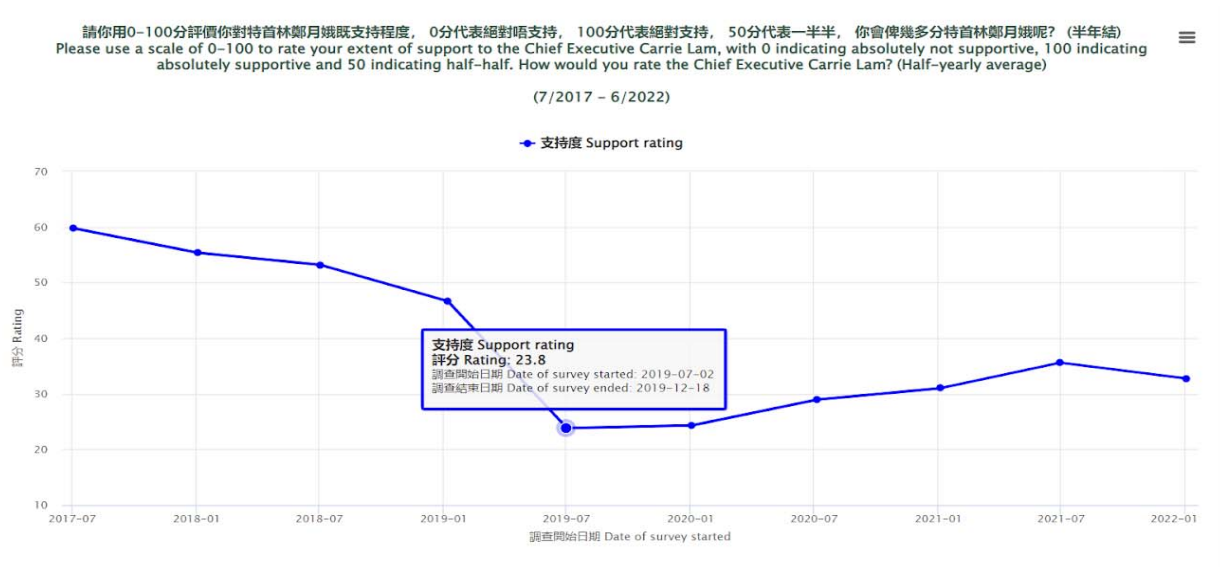


Figure 1. HKPORI polls on Carrie Lam’s approval rate as head of the Legislative Council

³¹⁴ Ema Graham-Harrison, “Hong Kong protesters unimpressed by Lam’s ‘sincere’ apology”, *The Guardian*, July 18, 2019, [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/18/hong-kong-carrie-lam-to-apologise-to-protesters-extradition-bill], Accessed 10 Sep. 2023.

³¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁷ “Rating of Chief Executive Carrie Lam”, *HKPORI*, 2022, [https://www.pori.hk/pop-poll/chief-executive-en/past-chief-executive-en/a003-rating-perpoll.html?lang=en], Accessed October 2, 2023.

Conclusion

Starting from the spring of 2019 to the summer of 2020, Hong Kong underwent considerable socio-political changes in the forms of civil resistance, social unity, rights protections, and democratic status. It is indisputable that Carrie Lam's crisis management played a significant role in the conflict's outcome, and that her communication strategy worsened the social cohesion of an already divided society. Between growing support of democratic political practices and representativeness and the growing influence of Beijing, Lam's role as a mediator proved significant, yet unsuccessful in bridging the gap between the pro-democratic and the pro-Beijing sides. Moreover, the gap between younger and older generations became more apparent, while the growing radicalization of young people turned to localism.

By analysing Lam's nineteen addresses between June 2019 to July 2020, six main crisis communication characteristics were found, relating to the three stages of the conflict: before the protests, during and after them via the passing of the National Security Law. As such, her strategy is deficient, as proven by the escalation of the conflict and violence, and the end of her term as Chief Executive. The first part of the paper focused on the pre-2019 context of the Hong Kong-China dynamics, particularly on the role of authority in the integration into the mainland, continuing with a view of the 2019-2020 protests.

Then, Carrie Lam's crisis communication strategy was divided into six characteristics. The first one relates to the lack of preparation before issuing the extradition bill, in light of the socio-political, economic, and identity dynamics between Hong Kong and the mainland. This overlook resulted in the inflammation of activists, as well as in mobilizing previously unengaged people in the protests. The second characteristic is that of time management in conflict resolution, showing Lam's error in responding days later to critical incidents, as well as lacking clear responses or omitting questions. The third aspect is that of stressing the importance of authority over the demands of the protesters, by putting forward the narrative of the rule of law and the will of the governing bodies. The fourth characteristic continues the previous point in showing Lam's detachment from society by erasing the legitimacy of people's concerns and portraying them as violent and unreasonable. Moreover, her rhetoric around the role of young people in activism cost her their support, and even her invitations to dialogue misread the realities of the 2019 protests. Considering the previous arrests of activists and pro-democratic politicians, Lam's government created the condition for leaderless protests³¹⁸, in which communication with just a select part of the protesters is futile. The fifth characteristic shows the further disconnection between the demands of the protesters and authorities, as Lam's appraisal of the police left protesters dissatisfied in the light of police abuses. Lastly, the sixth aspect refers to Lam's opaqueness in delivering incomplete information, as can be seen in her speech about the National Security Law, where she comments on the limitations of rights and the potential undemocratic punishments that would affect only a minority of people, without defining what minority means.

Other than these six aspects, comparable results were drawn from the speech analysis performed on her nineteen addresses, by examining the most and least frequently used terms and their correlations. Following the two tables on this issue, one could observe Lam's focus on the

³¹⁸ Lee Francis, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

rule of law, and appraisal of authorities, as well as the criticism and disqualification of protesters and civil society. The failure of Lam's communication strategy resulted in the mishandling of the conflicts and the passing of the National Security Law, which irreparably damaged Hong Kong's democratic status, as well as her being discredited as Chief Executive, proving once again the relevance of strategic communication in positions of authority during conflicts.

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The Development of Narcoterrorism in the Sahel Region: Key Elements and Actors

Ana Ursachi

Abstract

In recent decades, the Sahel has become a favourable environment for nurturing narcoterrorism. Climatic conditions, poverty, Islamisation, intra-community conflicts, the inability of governments to manage crises, and the formation of a "social contract" between the local population and extremist organisations led to the rise and expansion of narcoterrorism in this region. Moreover, its expansion enhances global security concerns. The aim of this research is the analysis of the context of the emergence and development of narcoterrorism in the Sahelian band. Accordingly, the study explores the main elements and key actors of the ongoing development of these criminal activities.

Keywords: Sahel, narcoterrorism, extremism

Introduction

Narcoterrorism is a phenomenon that emerged in late 20th century South America. The increase in the number of narcotics users worldwide and the development of cartels and extremist groups have favoured the crossing of Latin American geographical boundaries of the new type of terrorism. The Sahel, an area of North-West Africa with a historically colonial past, now made up of ten states with a weak system of government incapable of controlling peripheral areas, has become a fertile environment for the infiltration, development, and expansion of narcoterrorism. The term narcoterrorism does not have a well-structured definition. In the context of the situation in the Sahel, we define this phenomenon as follows: narcoterrorism is the organisation of violent criminal actions through the illicit use and sale of narcotic substances.

Characterised by drought; poorly vegetated areas; inter-ethnic clashes; porous borders; lack of infrastructure, access to education, and medicine; high unemployment and a strong network of Islamist terrorist groups, the Sahel has become a fertile region for drug trafficking. The research topic reflects the development of narcoterrorism and the actors involved in the Sahel region. The research question of this study is: What are the factors and actors fostering the development of narcoterrorism in the Sahel region?. Determining and analysing these elements will contribute to the understanding of the development of narcoterrorism, as well as to the identification of effective methods and instruments to address it.

The methodology used comprises two types of approaches: descriptive-empirical and historical-interpretive. Through descriptive-empirical analysis, will be described and examined the occurrence of narcoterrorism and its implications. The historical-interpretive approach will explain the main processes involved in the research topic, such as the Islamisation of the Sahel,

colonisation, and the war in Libya. The first section of the research analyses the context of the emergence and development of narcoterrorism. This includes approaching the Sahel region from two perspectives: the Sahel - a free trade zone and the Sahel - a zone of inter-ethnic tensions. This section also analyses the influence of socio-economic factors and geopolitical changes since the end of the 20th century on the Sahel region. In the second section, an analysis of the actors involved in narcoterrorism is developed. Dividing the actors into three categories: jihadist actors, internal actors, and external actors will allow a better examination of the motivation, modus operandi and relationships formed between different groups of actors. At the same time, will be explored the transit routes of narcotics in the Sahel.

I. Context analysis

The Sahel is a region of Northwest Africa, a transition zone from the Sahara Desert to the Sudan savannah. The term Sahel, which means shore in Arabic, was used by medieval Arab chroniclers to describe the “southern shore of the ocean” Sahara³¹⁹ and defines the same area today. The region comprises ten countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. All the states were former colonies, which gained sovereignty in the second half of the 20th century and are part of the Third World group of countries. They are characterised by a lack of good governance, poverty, harsh climatic conditions due to the desert area, poorly developed infrastructure, inter-ethnic conflict, and lack of education.

The background analysis of this region, based on the identification of historical, geopolitical, religious, socio-professional, economic, cultural, and political factors, gives us a clear representation of the conditions in which narcoterrorism emerged and continues to develop. Thus, we will examine the Sahel region from several perspectives, explaining its characteristics and the influence of heterogeneous factors that have contributed to the social, economic, and political shaping of the Sahel states.

I.1. Sahel - free trade area

In the foreground, the Sahel is characterised as a free trade area. This semi-desert region of Africa is a favourable ground for developing relations between different categories of people. Consequently, it has contributed to the formation of economic, cultural, social, religious, and political exchange relations between communities. This region's specific geographical factor has led to many movements of the local population, resulting in their interaction with heterogeneous elements.

The Sahel falls into the semi-arid, transitional savannah-desert climate zone category with an area of 3,053,000 km². The semi-desert climate is characterised by low rainfall of 250 to 500 mm

³¹⁹ Abdoul Hameth Ba, *Acteurs et territoires du Sahel*, Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2007, p. 33, doi: [https://doi.org/10.4000/books.enseditions.910], accessed on 09.10.2023.

per year, and average annual temperatures between 26 and 29 degrees Celsius³²⁰, resulting in poor vegetation growth. Hence, local herders move throughout the year in search of pasture, leading to the development of nomadism. The lack of vegetation, mountains or other natural barriers makes it easier to move around this area. The Sahel is an ideal area for economic exchanges, caravanning and the movement of people and goods. The 1800 km long Senegal River, flowing through the Sahelian arid and semi-arid parts of Senegal, Mauritania, and Mali, contributes to the development of agriculture, fishing, and economy.³²¹

An essential role in the analysis of the Sahel region is played by the religious factor, namely the emergence and development of Islam in the Sahel region. The 10th and 11th centuries represent the period of Islamisation of the Sahel. Due to trade and caravan travel from countries such as Libya and Morocco, Islam was spread in the region's countries. Consequently, the assimilation of Islam by Sahel merchants made it possible to create more trade links with Muslim merchants in North Africa and the Middle East. For instance, Islam was spread into Chad from Libya and Sudan. The first trade route establishing trade between Tripoli and the "Black Country" was the Garamantes route, which started from Tripoli, passing through Ghadames, Libya, and ending in Gao, in the Mali Empire. That trade passage was established in 1500 BC by the Berbers. To the east of the Garamantes route, three other trade routes start in Tripoli and end in Chad: the Bilma, Darbal-Arabain (or Forty Days Road), and the third route from Benghazi, Libya, to Waddai, Chad. These four routes allowed Libyan (and Egyptian) culture to penetrate sub-Saharan Africa.³²² The local Sahelian population assimilated Islam, but mostly, it was syncretistic, blended with endogenous beliefs. To this day, there are groups of people following Islam blended with local beliefs. Another form of Islam, which has powerfully infiltrated the Sahel, is Sufism, characterised by the idea that an approach to Allah occurs through mystical knowledge, love and asceticism. Interaction with other beliefs has, therefore, led to the formation of a rigid foundation of Islam in the Sahel, with the majority of the population in Sahelian countries being of Muslim faith, which in the following centuries would foster the development of different forms of Islam.

A key event for the Arab-Muslim world is the Arab Spring of 2011. In several Arab countries during 2011-2012, Islamist political parties became leading political forces: the Islamic Renaissance Movement (Harakat al-Nahda al-Islamiyya) in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood Association in Egypt, the Islamic State (Al-Dawa al-Islamiyya) in parts of Syria and Iraq, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Shia Houthi Movement in Yemen. All Muslim political movements have addressed the theory of Jihad, in the different interpretations of it.³²³

³²⁰ United Nations Environment Programme, *Afrique: Atlas d'un Environnement en Mutation*, Nairobi, 2008, [https://www.pseau.org/outils/ouvrages/unep_afrique_atlas_environnement_mutation_fr.pdf], p. 9, accessed on 09.10.2023.

³²¹ Aude N. Taïbi *et al.*, "The Senegal River, a Disturbed Lifeline in the Sahel", in K. M. Wantzen (ed.), *River Culture – Life as a Dance to the Rhythm of the Waters*, Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2023, p. 79, doi: 10.54677/YRPT3013, accessed on 29.10.2023.

³²² Ricardo Laremont and Hrach Gregorian, "Political Islam in West Africa and the Sahel", *Military Review*, Volume LXXXVI, No. 1, January-February, 2006, p. 33.

³²³ Evgeny Zelenev, "Islam in Contemporary Africa: Liminality and Re-Islamization", *Asia and Africa Today*, no. 7, 2019, doi: 10.31857/S032150750005563-1, accessed on 09.10.2023.

Consequently, the radical form of Islam is spreading rapidly to areas other than those at the epicentre of the Arab Spring, one of the seriously affected being the Sahel.

The Sharia movement in the north has also advanced because of substantial ongoing support from external sources in Sudan, Iran, Libya, Syria, Palestine and especially Saudi Arabia.³²⁴ The Persian Gulf countries support the spread of radicalised Islam, called Salafism, in the Sahel. For example, they build mosques and Islamic cultural centres, publish Islamic religious literature, and organise study circles in mosques and courses in madrassas.³²⁵ Hence, extremist groups integrate straightforwardly into local communities because of their shared religion. At the same time, the connection with extremist groups is facilitated by the fact that the groups participate in regional trade, often illegal.

I.2. The Sahel - an area of inter-ethnic tensions

Africa is a continent beset by a lot of inter-ethnic confrontation. Rivalry between ethnic communities is a widespread phenomenon across the continent. African identity and ethno-political conflicts have occurred in West, Central and East African states. The conflict in Liberia, the wars between Tuaregs and Mauri, the wars in Kivu and Ituri, the conflict in Darfur, the Rwandan war, and the conflict in Burundi³²⁶ serve as pertinent examples.

The multitude of ethnic communities characterising the Sahel, such as Arabs, Tuaregs, Berbers, Dogons, Fulani, Moors, and Hausa, causes rivalries and disputes. The most pressing inter-ethnic conflicts in the Sahel region are between the Tuaregs, Peuli and Mauri. The area occupied by Tuaregs, and nomadic Moors covers southern Algeria, northern Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Western Sahara.³²⁷ In this regard, we examine the conflict between the Tuareg and Maur ethnic communities in the northern part of Mali. The Tuareg ethnic community is engaged in herding and cattle breeding, populating the north and north-western regions of Mali. To earn additional income, they participate in illicit activities, which take place through trans-Saharan trade routes. The local roots of jihadist groups strongly influence Arab-Tuareg leaders in northern Mali, positioning these communities for drug trafficking.³²⁸ The Tuaregs are a nomadic people, practicing the Islamic faith.

The Moors are located between the central part of the state and the east-north. From a socio-professional point of view, the Moors are shepherds. They are nomadic and Muslim. As both ethnic communities are engaged in transhumant herding, conflicts often arise over natural

³²⁴ Laremont and Gregorian, *op. cit.* p. 30.

³²⁵ Zelenev, *op. cit.*

³²⁶ Antoine-Denis N'Dimina-Mougala, "Les conflits identitaires ou ethnopolitiques africains au XXe siècle: caractéristiques et manifestations", *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, Vol 248, No. 4, 2012, p. 100, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3917/gmcc.248.0097>, accessed on 09.10.2023.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 102.

³²⁸ International Crisis Group, "Narcotrafic, violence et politique au Nord du Mali. Rapport Afrique N°267", *crisisgroup.org*, 13 December 2018, p. 14, [<https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/sahel/mali/267-narcotrafic-violence-et-politique-au-nord-du-mali>], accessed on 09.10.2023.

resources such as pasture or water. The foundations of this conflict are the scarcity of natural resources, the lack of governance and the state's involvement.

The diversity of cultures and socio-professional groups, including farmers, livestock breeders, herders, and fishermen, in the Sahel region contributes to local conflicts. There are three distinct categories of disputes that have been identified: conflicts over resources; struggles for regional power or against the social order; and tensions between communities and state entities over perceived state failure.³²⁹ These conflicts destabilise the region's peace and facilitate government entities' loss of control over state governance. Consequently, central authorities are unable to maintain law and order, leading to an increase in illegal activities, corruption, and the emergence of terrorist groups.

Another important factor to consider is the rebellions led by different ethnic groups against the government. In Mali and Niger, the uprisings were led by Tuareg leaders. In Chad, during the first thirty years of independence, we are witnessing the birth of many rebellions triggered by war leaders from the northern communities of the state (Tubu, Goran, Arabs, etc.).³³⁰ The war in Mali, which emerged in 2012, highlights the complexity of the problems between the state and the ethnic communities within it, but more so, the inability of the state to govern and manage its population. This conflict's roots can be traced back to Mali's independence in 1958. Rebellions started in the 1960s, 1990s, 2000s and 2012 by the Tuareg ethnic community. Until the 1990s, the sparsely inhabited desert regions in the north of the state benefited much less than other parts because the government developed infrastructure in the much more populated areas in the southern region.³³¹ The rebellions for separating this northern territory from the Malian state began as early as 1990 when the Tuareg population demanded the creation of Azawad as an entity with special political status within the Malian state. Azawad is the northern territory of Mali, characterised by a semi-arid climate, making living conditions more precarious and challenging for the local population, the majority of whom are Tuareg and Mauri. The 1990 conflict contributed to the decentralisation of the Malian state and the formation of three regions in the north: Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu.

Decentralisation is another factor that has worsened the relationship between the state and its regions, as the government in Bamako has lost even more control over the northern part. The northern ethnic communities have begun not to recognise the existence of a central power in Mali. Therefore, this reality of the absence of the state prevailed in 2011, when the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNA), after calling for an administration closer to the realities of the North, became the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). In 2012, the uprisings escalated with the aim of establishing the state of Azawad, an open conflict

³²⁹ William Assanvo *et al*, "Extrémisme violent, criminalité organisée et conflits locaux dans le Liptako-Gourma. Rapport sur l'Afrique de l'Ouest 26", *Institut d'études de sécurité*, 26 December 2019, p. 3, [<https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-fr.pdf>], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³³⁰ Serigne Bamba Gaye, "Connexions entre groupes djihadistes et réseaux de contrebande et de trafics illicites au Sahel", *Fondation Friedrich Ebert*, Séries FES sur la Paix et la Sécurité en Afrique No. 29, p. 9, [<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fes-pscc/14175.pdf>], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³³¹ Dan Henk, "Conflict and conflict resolution in the Sahel: The Tuareg insurgency in Mali", *United States Army War College Publications*, 1 May 1998, [<https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1857&context=monographs>], p. 6, accessed on 09.10.2023.

against the presence of the Malian authorities in the region. With the fall of Colonel Gaddafi's regime, the MNLA was joined by an armed wing, including some Tuaregs who had previously been integrated into the Libyan army.³³² Former soldiers of the Libyan military, mostly jihadists, are entering the northern Malian region. The involvement of these new actors in the Sahel increases the fragility of the whole area, leading to the development of terrorism, trafficking in narcotics and arms, and the emergence of organised crime.

Political instability is present in most Sahel states. Many of these countries have suffered coups d'état, Mauritania in 2008, Niger in 2010, Mali in 2012, as well as armed rebellions, which led in the case of Sudan to a de jure partition of the territory in 2011 and in the case of Mali to a de facto division of the region in 2012.³³³ Unlike the northern part of Mali, the country's south is a much more developed area, thanks to the savannah climate, more favourable to agricultural and economic activities. Another reason is the geographical location of the capital, Bamako, in the southern region. As a result, most investment and infrastructure development occur in the south, and the region is much more controlled by the government. Peace, security and governance researcher in Africa, Dr Serigne Bamba Gaye, notes that the common denominator of all rebellions in the Sahel area is the denunciation of development inequalities between the southern and northern regions, and the inability of states to implement inclusive public policies capable of responding to the basic needs of the population.³³⁴ The government's management of the central region of the state and neglect of the periphery is one of the causes of the fragility of many Sahelian states.

I.3. Social and economic factors

Population growth is a relevant feature of the Sahel countries. We are witnessing population growth from 2.3% annually in Mauritania to 4% in Niger. The most worrying case is Niger, where the population has gone from 3 million at independence to 21 million today.³³⁵ A population explosion is therefore expected across the region over the next two decades. The high population growth rate is causing several problems and difficulties for states in health, education, and the economy. For example, in Burkina Faso, the annual population growth rate was around 3% in 2016, but the poverty rate was 40.1%. Consequently, this difference between the employed and unemployed population causes internal conflicts and a lack of access to education and medicine for about half of the population. Otherwise, population growth directs to the growth of an urban social bomb. In Niger in 2015, 240 000 young men joined the workforce. By 2035, there will be 576,000.³³⁶

³³² Pauline Poupart, "L'Azawad comme enjeu des négociations de paix au Mali: quel statut pour un territoire contesté?", *Confluences Méditerranée*, Vol. 101, No. 2, 2017, p. 101, doi: 10.3917/come.101.0097, accessed on 09.10.2023.

³³³ Vincent Boncase and Julien Brachet, "Les "crises sahéliennes" entre perceptions locales et gestions internationales", *Politique africaine*, Vol. 130, No.2, 2013, p. 5, doi: 10.3917/polaf.130.0005, accessed on 09.10.2023.

³³⁴ Gaye, *op. cit.*

³³⁵ Serge Michailof, "Les racines économiques et sociales de la guerre au Sahel", *WillAgri*, 16 March 2020, p. 2, [https://www.willagri.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Dossier-Willagri-03-20-1.pdf], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 8.

Access to education is another crucial issue in the Sahelian states. The poverty and the inability of the state authorities to build schools and provide education for all children lead to a high illiteracy rate. In Mali, in the absence of official statistics, school attendance rates are estimated at 2 and 3% for the children of nomadic herders.³³⁷ The same is true for the population's limited access to health services, the health coverage is insufficient and of poor quality.³³⁸ People's access to healthcare is limited mainly by the cost of services: more than half of families do not have the means to provide their children with the medical follow-up they need.³³⁹

The economy is characterised by agriculture and small family businesses. The region is rich in natural deposits and minerals. Chad ranks 10th in Africa for oil extraction, Niger extracts uranium and less oil is extracted, and Burkina Faso's economy is dominated by cotton production and gold mining. The agricultural sector accounts for 25% of the GDP of the Sahelian countries, but the rural environment concentrates the greatest poverty and a population highly vulnerable to climatic, political, or economic shocks.³⁴⁰ Low agricultural production and high population numbers outline the presence of food insecurity in the Sahel region. Extreme chronic food insecurity (less than a daily calorie intake of 1,800 calories/day) still affects more than 20% of Niger's population. It is also estimated that 40% of children under 5 are underweight, and 15% are acutely malnourished.³⁴¹

Acute poverty and the inability of governments to manage crises and provide the population with optimal living conditions lead to riots, intra-community conflicts, and young people joining terrorist entities to gain access to the resources necessary for life. Poor communities on the periphery of the state, where the presence of central powers is not felt, become an attractive environment for terrorist groups. At the same time, young people are attracted by the opportunity to earn money and receive protection. The illicit activities contribute to the regeneration of the local economy without state regulation.³⁴² The presence of non-state actors destroys, also, social cohesion, the relationship between central power and citizens. In Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger, the social climate is deteriorating in the face of austerity measures taken by states, which directly affect the poorest. The large-scale protests and strikes in Chad, following drastic public spending cuts and gross tax increases imposed since 2016, dramatically illustrate this.³⁴³

I.4. Sahel - a geostrategic area for drug trafficking

The end of the 20th century was marked by many geopolitical changes, including the change in the drug trade route from Latin America to Europe and Asia. Moreover, the increased consumption of narcotics such as cocaine in the 1980s and 1990s led to increased drug production,

³³⁷ Jean-Denis Crola, "Sahel: lutter contre les inégalités pour répondre aux défis du développement et de la sécurité", *Oxfam*, 2 July 2019, p. 5, doi: 10.21201/2019.4481, [<https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620835/bp-sahel-inequality-030719-fr.pdf>], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³³⁸ Michailof, *op. cit.*

³³⁹ Crola, *op. cit.* p. 5.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 25.

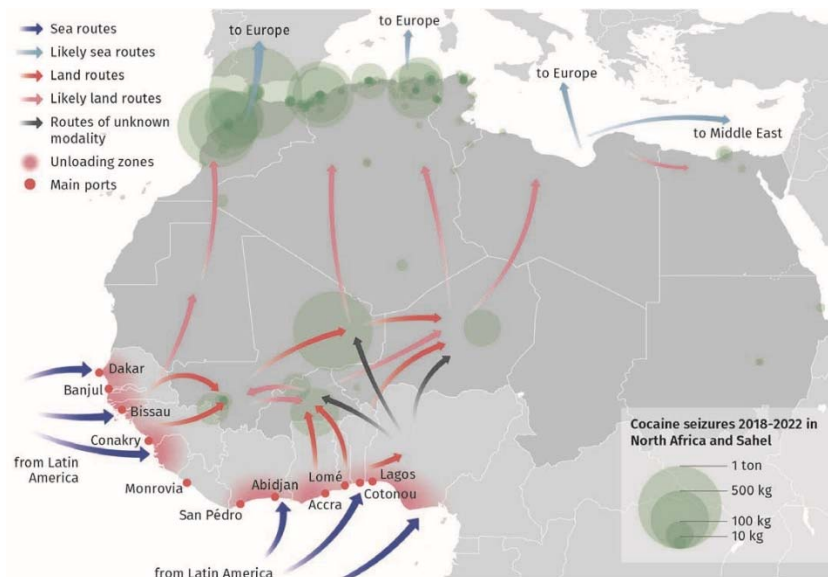
³⁴¹ Michailof, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁴² Gaye, *op. cit.*

³⁴³ Crola, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

the rise of new transport routes and the development of cartels, for instance, in Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. To fight drug trafficking, countries began to change their laws and better control their domestic affairs. Several measures have been taken to dismantle air and sea drug transfer networks between Latin America and Europe. Thus, West Africa became a transit zone from Latin America to Western Europe³⁴⁴ in the last decades of the 20th century. Cocaine arrives in countries on the western coast of the Sahel, such as Ghana, and Nigeria and is redistributed throughout the area to reach Europe. The routes are shown in Map 1.

Map 1. Cocaine trafficking routes across West and North Africa, and significant cocaine seizures in the Sahel and North Africa 2018-2022³⁴⁵



From North Africa to the Sahel were shaped routes to distribute another type of drug, cannabis, originating in Morocco, the world's leading cannabis-growing country. As an example, a Saharan-Sahelian route has been on the rise since the early 2000s. The cargo leaves northern Morocco for northern Mauritania (passing east of Morocco and Berm). In the north of Mauritania, in the Tiris Zemmour region, this route branches off reasonably quickly to northern Mali, which it crosses before continuing to the north of Niger.³⁴⁶ This route involves economically underdeveloped areas, lacking substantial state control, with a majority Muslim population and perpetually in conflict with other communities and central state power, e.g., the Azawad region of Mali. This external factor, drug trafficking threatens the peace and security of the people. West

³⁴⁴ Gaye, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

³⁴⁵ UNODC, "Global report on Cocaine 2023 – Local dynamics, global challenges", *unodc.org*, 2023, p. 27, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁴⁶ Simon Julien, "Le Sahel comme espace de transit des stupéfiants. Acteurs et conséquences politiques", *Hérodote*, Vol. 142, No. 3, 2011, p. 127, doi: https://doi.org/10.3917/her.142.0125, accessed on 09.10.2023.

Africa was chosen for the narco-routes due to its numerous comparative advantages, such as the countries' weak structures and institutions.³⁴⁷

The ideas and actions promoted by radicalised groups are not perceived by local Muslim communities as heterogeneous elements. This has allowed the creation of a denser network of jihadist terrorist groups. The problem of poverty motivated many young people to join jihadist groups in order to secure a more decent living than the state can provide. Besides, extremist groups may take some ethnic or socio-professional communities under their wing. People join or support members of these groups with resources such as food and shelter. The terrorist group can offer more critical resources than the government to the population on the periphery. This fact attracts the general public to join. "Drug trafficking is organised by others. We only provide security for convoys coming from Mauritania, transiting Timbuktu." Member of Ganda Kyo, Ansongo, Mali, 6 December 2018³⁴⁸

Political instability in the Sahel states, poverty and inter-ethnic conflicts are some of the causes that have made the Sahel fertile ground for narcoterrorism. Terrorist groups become allies in the transit of drugs, benefiting from the financial resources of illicit activities. These resources are needed to procure weapons, vehicles, medicines, food, and clothing. Over the last decade, the number of extremist organisations and communities in the Sahel area has grown exponentially, increasingly involving the local population.

II. Analysis of actors

In this section, we will analyse the actors involved in the development of narcoterrorism in the Sahel. This study determines the primary and secondary characters participating in the illicit drug trade, their motivation, and the mechanisms they use to conduct narcoterrorism in the Sahel-Saharan band. Actors are divided into three categories: jihadist actors: notably AQIM and Boko Haram; internal actors: local mafia, citizens, traders, and state mafia; and external actors: cartels and international mafia networks. In the second part, we will explore the links between these three categories and analyse the drug transportation routes in West Africa and the modus operandi of African terrorist groups. This analysis will contribute to the further development of the subject, as the countries of the Sahel region form one of the largest transshipment regions for narcotics. For example, the amount of cocaine seized in the rest of the world in 2018 remained limited, with 5.6 tonnes seized in Africa (mainly North Africa).³⁴⁹ But at the end of 2019, authorities in Uruguay seized over two tonnes of cocaine destined for West Africa.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 134.

³⁴⁸ Assanvo *et al*, *op. cit.*

³⁴⁹ „Booklet 3" in *World Drug Report 2020*, New York: United Nations publication, p. 19, [<https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/en/drug-supply.html>], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁵⁰ "Booklet 1" in *World Drug Report 2020*, New York: United Nations publication, p. 19, [<https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/en/exsum.html>], accessed on 09.10.2023.

II.1. Jihadist actors. AQIM and Boko Haram

A process cannot start without a driving force, and in the case of narcoterrorism, it is the jihadist actors. The region's vulnerabilities have nurtured the development of extremist associations and organisations. Among the most significant associations are Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram, Group in Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), Islamic State in the Sahara (EIGS), Ansar Dine, etc., sharing the pan-Islamism and Jihad. In order to better capture the process by which terrorist groups emerged, developed, and participated in narco-trafficking, we will analyse only two organisations that significantly destabilise the Sahel region. These are Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram. Hamdy A. Hassan, a Professor in Political Science, in his paper "A New Hotbed for Extremism? Jihadism and Collective Insecurity in the Sahel", mentions the existence of two hotbeds of violent extremism. The first includes Mali and its close neighbours Burkina Faso and Niger in the Western Sahel, where several groups are linked to AQIM. The second is concentrated in the Lake Chad basin, including Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, an area suffering from Boko Haram terrorism.³⁵¹

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was formed in January 2007 as the successor to the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) in Algeria, founded by Abdelmalek Droukdel. The ideologies of this organisation are the following: Wahhabism (advocating a return to the early Islam of the Qur'an and Sunnah, rejecting later innovations, founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab³⁵²), jihad, anti-Westernism, as well as some features of racism and anti-Semitism. The war in Libya was the most essential cause of AQIM's spread from Algeria to the Sahel-Saharan band. It has had two significant consequences. In March 2011, AQIM participants gained access to Libyan weapons stockpiles, such as pistols, and heavier weapons such as surface-to-air missiles.³⁵³ This allowed the extremist group to arm itself to resist the defence forces of other states and conquer and defend the territories it would deploy. The second consequence of the conflict is the mobility of men, because, before the war, Libya hosted many migrant workers, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, such as Mali, Niger, and Chad. Consequently, Tuaregs from Mali and Niger, Zaghawas from Chad, and Sudan, former participants of the Libyan Islamic Legion³⁵⁴, voluntarily joined AQIM upon returning home.

Access to weapons and the presence of human resources is a perfect binomial for strengthening and spreading AQIM. The main drugs transiting the Sahel are cocaine, cannabis, tramadol, and heroin. These are supplied by the heads of extremist groups, who receive them

³⁵¹ Hamdy A Hassan, "A New Hotbed for Extremism? Jihadism and Collective Insecurity in the Sahel", *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2020, pp. 207-208, doi: 10.18588/202011.00a120, accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁵² *Oxford Reference*, Wahhabism, [https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803120333822], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁵³ Alain Antil, "Africa. Le Sahel fragilisé par le terrorisme et la guerre en Libye", in Thierry de Montbrial (ed.), *Les États submergés: Ramses 2012*, Paris: Institut français des relations internationales, 2011, p. 192. doi: 10.3917/ifri.demon.2011.01.0188, accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 193.

from their superiors in towns such as Boulekeessi and Timbuktu.³⁵⁵ The land AQIM has occupied since the war in Libya is the northern Malian region of Azawad.

Participation in the transit of AQIM drug trafficking is characterized by Simon Julien in his article *“Le Sahel comme espace de transit des stupéfiants. Acteurs et conséquences politiques”*:

“It transits the southern territory of Algeria, involving the Salafist AQIM brigade and Algerian officers. Another route crosses Morocco along the coast to enter Mauritania via Nouadhibou, passes through Nouakchott, then heads east to Mauritania, taking the 'route de l'Espoir' before heading towards Mali's network of paved roads.”³⁵⁶

Julien illustrates not only the involvement of AQIM but also some of the routes that narcotics take, passing through Sahel states such as Mauritania and Mali because of the porous borders of these states, and gives us a factual example of the inability of governments to control peripheral parts of states.

The transit routes of narcotics are diverse. Drugs and psychotropic substances are transported by sea, land, and air. One example is the “Air Cocaine” affair, which transported 10 tonnes of cocaine to Mali. AQIM's role in the “Air Cocaine” deal in 2009 was instrumental in delivering some of the substance to Europe.³⁵⁷ It is, therefore, plausible that AQIM is involved in drug trafficking, being one of the key players in the Sahel, in actions such as taxing drug convoys passing through their territorial strongholds.³⁵⁸ In addition to drug trafficking in the Sahel, AQIM is one of the organisations involved in arms trafficking, with an estimated 80,000 Kalashnikovs circulating in the area.³⁵⁹ One of the most essential sources of weapons is from Libya, stemming from the first Libyan civil war in 2011.

Boko Haram is another critical player in Sahel narcoterrorism. The sect was founded in Maiduguri by Mohammed Yusuf and taken over by Abubakar Shekau in 2010, the “Community of the Companions of the Prophet for the Propagation of Islam and Holy War” (Jama'atu Ahl-i-Sunnah Lida'awati Wal Jihad) is deeply rooted in the Kanuri land of Borno in northeastern Nigeria.³⁶⁰ Boko Haram is a religious sect, a Koranic school that has become a terrorist group. A researcher at the French Institute for Research in Africa, Elodie Apard, suggests listening to Yusuf

³⁵⁵ William Assanvo *et al*, “Extrémisme violent, criminalité organisée et conflits locaux dans le Liptako-Gourma. Rapport sur l’Afrique de l’Ouest 26”, *Institut d’études de sécurité*, 26 December 2019, p. 13, [https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-fr.pdf], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁵⁶ Simon Julien, “Le Sahel comme espace de transit des stupéfiants. Acteurs et conséquences politiques”, *Hérodote*, Vol. 142, No. 3, 2011, p. 129, doi: https://doi.org/10.3917/her.142.0125, accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁵⁷ Serigne Bamba Gaye, “Connexions entre groupes djihadistes et réseaux de contrebande et de trafics illicites au Sahel”, *Fondation Friedrich Ebert, Séries FES sur la Paix et la Sécurité en Afrique* No. 29, p. 15, [http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fes-pscc/14175.pdf], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁵⁸ José Luengo-Cabrera and Anouk Moser, “Transatlantic drug trafficking - via Africa”, *The European Union Institute for Security Studies*, January 2016, p. 2, doi: 10.2815/34132, accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁵⁹ Gaye, *op. cit.* p. 16.

³⁶⁰ Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, “Boko Haram et la mise en récit du terrorisme au « Sahelistan ». Une perspective historique” in *Afrique contemporaine*, Vol. 255, No. 3, 2015, p. 22, doi: https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.255.0021, accessed on 09.10.2023.

and Shekau's speeches, paying attention to what they say and how they say it.³⁶¹ The basis of the ideology of this terrorist group is found in Mohammed Yusuf's work "Ha - dhihi 'Aqīdatuna- wa- Manhaj Da'watina-" (Our Doctrine and Methods of Preaching), which is the only written production, founding text and ideological basis of Boko Haram.³⁶² The father of this ideology is Yusuf. His personality is fascinating, as from being a disciple of a well-known ulema in Nigeria, Ja'afar Mahmud Adam, he came to form his creed and became a mentor to thousands. Thus, in the early 2000s, Yusuf was inspired by the theology of Wahhabism and Salafism. He gradually distanced himself from Ja'afar Mahmud Adam's ideas and adopted firm positions towards the state and the West.³⁶³ In 2005, after a voluntary exile in Saudi Arabia, he became a particularly prolific freelance preacher, setting up a mosque in Maiduguri, the capital of Nigeria's Borno state³⁶⁴. He propagated his ideas through speeches and sermons that attracted a prominent following - especially men in their 20s and 40s.³⁶⁵ His sermons are often filmed and broadcast on various media channels. From attracting hundreds of people, Yusuf has reached thousands. Elodie Apard explains:

"Yusuf is not a great theologian - his ability to analyse sacred texts is limited - but he is an excellent orator who offers a different, more radical, and political kind of preaching. While rejection of the state has been promoted by other preachers [...] Yusuf goes further in ideas and words; he uses national and international news to denounce corruption, inequality or even abuses by the police and military, developing a sense of injustice and feeding calls for hatred and violence, significant elements of his discourse."³⁶⁶

The region where Boko Haram is nesting is around Lake Chad. It is located on the border between four countries: Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon, which allows the participants to control the boundaries in this region and have easy access to any of these four countries. The location of this sect is a linchpin for insecurity and destabilisation of a part much more significant than the proximity of Lake Chad. The area around the lake is characterised by the absence of electricity, limited access to medicine, and elevated levels of food insecurity and poverty. At the same time, Boko Haram is in a dynamic of connection and collaboration with criminal groups to control trafficking around the Lake Chad basin. This allows them to control a large part of the routes through which heroin passes from Asia. To do this, Boko Haram relies heavily on the support of the local population, especially young people, to control the illicit trafficking routes around the Lake Chad basin.³⁶⁷ As a sect founded on the Koranic School, which simultaneously continues to deliver humanitarian aid in the region and to teach children and the population Islamist ideas, Boko Haram benefits from the fact that many young people join the sect voluntarily, firmly convinced in the truth of fundamentalist teachings. Some of the young people also become users of narcotics.

³⁶¹ Élodie Apard, "Les mots de Boko Haram. Décryptages de discours de Mohammed Yusuf et d'Abubakar Shekau", *Afrique contemporaine*, Vol. 255, No. 3, 2015, p. 44, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.255.0043>, accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ Gaye, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

II.2. Internal actors. Local mafia, traders, citizens

Another group of actors participating in the drug trafficking system at the local level comprises citizens, the mafia and local traders, and the state mafia. They are vital links in the trafficking chain that connect with Salafist groups, external actors, and the diaspora. Highly developed African mafia groups are in Niger, Ghana, and Libya. The Niger mafia is heavily involved in cocaine trafficking. These groups specialise in sending mules in large numbers from various airlines to Europe.³⁶⁸ The Nigerian mafia associates with Latin Americans in West Africa, but relying mainly on the Nigerian diaspora in Brazil, they can go directly to Latin America for cocaine.³⁶⁹ Another criminal group involved in cocaine trafficking originating in Latin America but destined for Europe is from Ghana.³⁷⁰

Regardless of the fact that participation in illegal actions is prohibited by law, citizens continue to be involved in illegal drug trafficking. Besides, many Tuareg groups do not want to lose control over the drug trade, which is routed to Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger.³⁷¹ Poor living conditions motivate the general public to join jihadist groups. These groups offer citizens the opportunity to receive income from their participation in drug trafficking and offer them protection. For example, in the deteriorating security situation on the Mali-Niger border, the terrorist groups use local conflicts to recruit members.³⁷² Another way in which the population and the terrorist group relate is through marriage. This makes it easier for the given groups to transit community areas.³⁷³ Drug trafficking groups form quickly among tribal factions. For example, northern Mali is populated by Tuaregs. This geographical region is AQIM's area of occupation. As a result, individuals of Tuareg origin are more easily and quickly involved in the transit of narcotics due to poverty, and their previous experience in trafficking.

Traders in the Sahel states are often involved in trafficking drugs such as cocaine and hashish. They also know the best ways to get cargo from one country to another. Further, relatively emerging players are members of groups that dominate the retail market in specific neighbourhoods of European cities, who come to West Africa to obtain cocaine to maximise their profits. These actors are predominantly from the West African diaspora.³⁷⁴ Besides, many traders are forming the African diaspora in Europe who facilitate the transit of drugs to their destination.

The state mafia in West Africa comprises segments of the business world, senior administration, relatives or inner circle of the president and people in the political world. These segments take root in the population due to clientelist networks that may or may not embrace ethno-regional and brotherly solidarity.³⁷⁵ Moreover, through corruption, the state mafia acts on the civil security forces and on state officials checking luggage, goods and means of transport passing through customs. The involvement of civil servants and state officials in drug trafficking

³⁶⁸ Julien, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ Gaye, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁷² Hassan, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

³⁷³ Gaye, *op. cit.*

³⁷⁴ Julien, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

is a significant problem for democratising the state and forming a robust and law-based country. The fact that local government is part of the network of actors indicates the underdevelopment of West African states, most of which are characterised as failed states. An eloquent example is the situation in Guinea-Bissau or Guinea-Conakry, where politicians and high-ranking soldiers are the organisers of cocaine transit.³⁷⁶

II.3. External actors. Drug cartels

The network of narco-terrorist actors includes not only local actors located in the Sahel area but also external actors who actively participate in this network, occupying one of the most crucial positions. Thus, among the members of the networks that feed drug trafficking and smuggling in the Sahel, we distinguish Latin American cartels (cocaine), Asian cartels (heroin), the local mafia, the African diaspora settled in the West, the Maghreb mafia.³⁷⁷

Drug trafficking originates in South America. The countries where cocaine is produced are mainly Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia. Latin American and European criminal organisations (Cosa Nostra, 'Ndrangheta, etc.) are powerful players. If we look at arrests of people outside the Sahel area, we can find Colombians, Venezuelans, Mexicans, Brazilians, Spaniards, Italians, and French.³⁷⁸ The diversity of the countries from which the cartels involved originate marks the fact that the drug trafficking network is a complex one, with solid roots and appears to be a profitable one for the cartels. The links between the actors are of a win-win nature, each party wins and simultaneously has a crucial role, and it is difficult to carry out trafficking if one link in the system is lost. Given that the Sahel is an unstable, poor region, and a sanctuary for terrorist groups, this area is well suited for drug trafficking, laying the foundation for narcoterrorism.

The establishment in Latin America of Italian mafia members such as 'Ndrangheta and Cosa Nostra also facilitates the transfer of narcotics to Europe³⁷⁹ through West Africa. The most transited type of drug is cocaine from Latin America. The orientation of drug cartels towards the European market increased in the late 1990s³⁸⁰ due to the policies against drug trafficking in North America and the increasing demand for narcotic and psychotropic substances in Europe. West Africa is an important transit area for cocaine from South America to Europe, as reflected in significant cocaine seizures in West Africa, Morocco, and Africa in recent years. Global seizures of cocaine from Africa increased from 1.2 tonnes in 2015 to 3.3 tonnes in 2017 and 5.6 tonnes in 2018.³⁸¹

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 137.

³⁷⁷ Gaye, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁷⁸ Julien, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

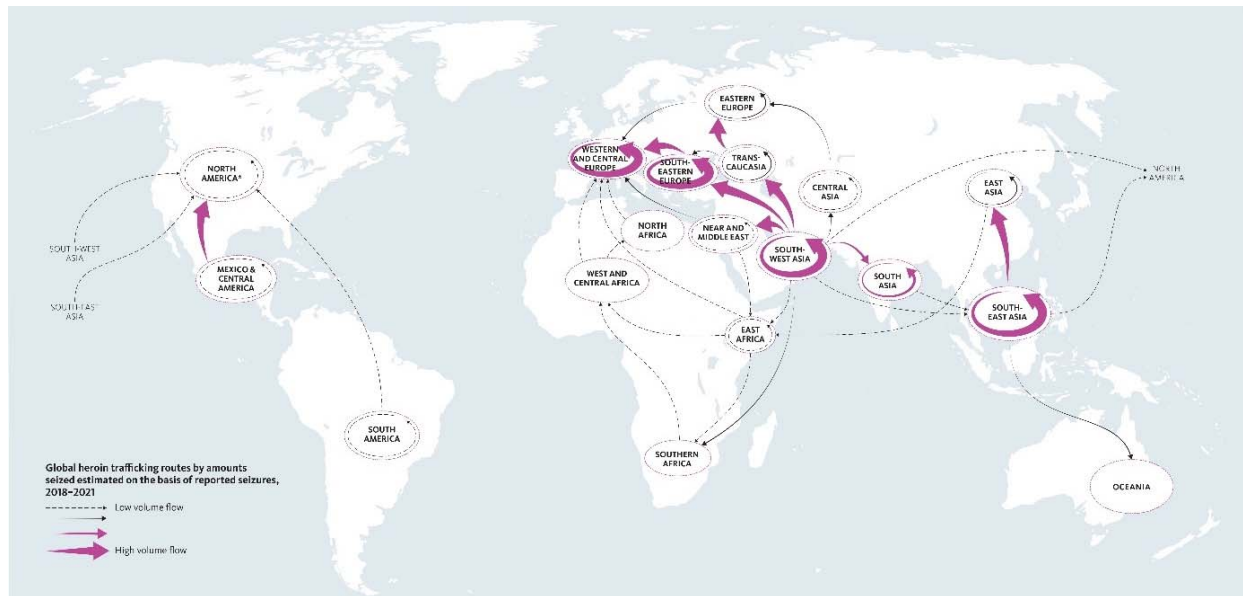
³⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 131.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

³⁸¹ United Nations publication, "Booklet 3", *op. cit.*, p. 31.

For the Asian cartels, West African countries serve as an area to transit heroin from Southeast Asia and West Asia to Europe and North America.³⁸² Additionally, amphetamines are synthesised in West Africa and distributed to nearby Asian states. Opium and heroin are substances originating in the Middle East and Southeast Asian states (see Map 2). For example, The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has recorded that heroin trafficked via the southern route from Pakistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran goes to India (for domestic consumption and re-export to countries in the region) and to Africa (for local consumption and re-export to Europe).³⁸³

Map 2. Main heroin trafficking flows as described by reported seizures, 2018-2021³⁸⁴



The need for the transshipment of drugs in the Sahel region has created the conditions for forming collaborative relationships between external cartels and local fundamentalist groups. In other words, the network of actors can be seen as a “spider's web”. Thus, the multitude and diversity of actors make the problem of drug trafficking and narcoterrorism more challenging to solve.

II.4. Relationship between internal and external actors

Internal and external actors cooperate strongly in narcoterrorism. They create distinct types of connections between them, facilitating the transportation of narcotics and allowing for

³⁸² *Pas seulement une zone de transit Drogues, État et société en Afrique de l'Ouest*, Geneva: Commission Ouest-Africaine sur les Drogues, June 2014, p. 12, [http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/WACD_Fr_Report_WEB_051114.pdf], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁸³ United Nations publication, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

³⁸⁴ UNODC, “Annex of the World Drug Report”, *unodc.org*, 2023, [https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2023_annex.html], accessed on 09.10.2023.

financial gains for each party involved. However, some actors involved in trafficking, such as the Salafist groups analysed above, use drug trafficking resources to conduct terrorist acts, as drug trafficking is a way of gaining financial resources.

The relations between external and internal actors are economic. In drug trafficking, African actors act as intermediaries who ensure the smooth transshipment of goods arriving in the Sahel region and heading for the market, often in Europe. Domestic players also produce synthesised drugs such as tramadol and amphetamines, usually destined for South-East Asia. The Colombian-led Valencia-Arbelaez cartel, for example, established links with several drug lords in West Africa, notably in the “narco-state” of Guinea-Bissau.³⁸⁵ Locally, jihadist groups form partnership links with the domestic mafia, either state-run or made up of ordinary citizens. In contrast, with rural and peripherally based communities, terrorist groups create a different type of link in which group members exercise authority over the community population.

II.5. Drug routes and transit routes. Modes of action of narco-terrorist groups

In this sub-section, we will determine the importance of the Sahel area in drug trafficking, the transshipment routes of narcotics and the *modus operandi* of the groups participating in this trafficking network. Thus, in the foreground, West Africa is not only an area of transit, but also storage, repackaging, and shipment of goods (see Map 1 and 2). At the beginning of 2011, cocaine was circulating in several African countries that had been stockpiled in northern Mali, proving that this area has been, since the arrival in 2009, of various cocaine planes, a storage site and not just a stopover on the traffickers' route.³⁸⁶ The cocaine does not end up in the area for local consumption, but is only in transit to the European market. In addition to West Africa, North Africa is a transshipment area for cocaine destined for Europe and other lucrative markets.³⁸⁷

Narcotic and psychotropic substances are trafficked via land, sea, and air routes. For example, by land, cocaine follows both the classic trans-Saharan Mauritania-Western Sahara-Morocco/Guinea-Conakry-Mali-Algeria/Gulf of Guinea-Niger-Algeria or Libya routes, but also takes more circuitous routes: eastern routes to the Red Sea and the Middle East/Atlantic market - Mali-Niger-Libya or Egypt-Balkans or finally more diffuse, “capillary” routes between West African capitals for small regional consumption.³⁸⁸ Sea routes are also used. The substances are transported directly or with 13 boat changes from West Africa to a North African port and/or a motorboat delivery to the Iberian Peninsula.³⁸⁹ In contrast, commercial airlines are used for air transshipment, with a preference for non-direct routes, i.e., with changes at North African airports, particularly Casablanca and Tripoli.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁵ Luengo-Cabrera, and Moser, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

³⁸⁶ Julien, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

³⁸⁷ United Nations publication, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

³⁸⁸ Julien, *op. cit.*, pp.131-132.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Terrorists and armed groups use unique methods and tactics, such as brutal gun attacks, roadside bombings, and hostage-taking, to achieve their goals.³⁹¹ Due to the fact that extremist groups participate in arms trafficking, they have direct access to weapons. Hostage-taking is common practice in AQIM as well as Boko Haram. It provides them with another source of earning financial resources, as a certain amount of money has to be paid for their release.

Another way narco-terrorist groups operate is by using social media platforms to propagate extremist ideology³⁹², which aims to attract as many sympathisers as possible. The most involved are young people because, in the reality in which they live, poverty, lack of jobs, underdeveloped education system and lack of access to healthcare, motivate them to be part of a group that can meet their vital needs, despite also being a terrorist group. The state and its institutions must imperatively offer young people prospects³⁹³, in this regard, jihadist groups are more successful. Hence, what possibilities can a terrorist group offer young people? Unemployed young people are often provided the opportunity to join the mafia networks that control regional trafficking within the Maghreb³⁹⁴, and they can also join armed groups on a temporary or permanent basis.³⁹⁵ Young people become important human capital for narco-terrorist groups.

In addition to the methods listed above, in areas where they do not have a considerable influence and are not present for long, armed groups use a hit-and-run method, launching intermittent attacks as if operating these areas by remote control. In 2020, the tentacles of terrorism extended from southwest Burkina Faso to Mali and western Niger.³⁹⁶

Conclusion

Since narcoterrorism is supported by the state mafia to the civilian population, annihilating this phenomenon will require robust and transparent cooperation between the state government (uncorrupted, and democratic), and its citizens. Examining the situation concerning the emergence, development, and evolution of narcoterrorism in the Sahel, we observe that narcoterrorism is a result of pre-existing problems. The geopolitical position, the porosity of borders, political instability, the lack of state police in many regions, conflicts between communities and socio-professional groups, and the anti-state and extremist ideologies disseminated and shared by part of the population are main factors that have created an environment beneficial to the rise of narcoterrorism.

An important key finding is the relationship between the local population and radicalised groups. Hence, extremist groups become “pseudo-governments” for certain communities, where a “social contract” is concluded between a group and the population. They provide security,

³⁹¹ Hassan, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ Maman Sambo Sidikou, “Et si la crise sécuritaire du Sahel était aussi (voire avant tout) économique ?”, *oecd-development-matters.org*, 25 November 2020, Section: Africa, [<https://oecd-development-matters.org/2019/11/25/et-si-la-crise-securitaire-du-sahel-etait-aussi-voire-avant-tout-economique/>], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁹⁴ Serge Michailof, “Les racines économiques et sociales de la guerre au Sahel”, *WillAgri*, 16 March 2020, p. 8, [<https://www.willagri.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Dossier-Willagri-03-20-1.pdf>], accessed on 09.10.2023.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ Hassan, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

money-making opportunities through the illegal economy, education through Koranic schools and meeting other needs of some communities.

The evolution of narcoterrorism is facilitated by a vast network of actors, which raises the issue of these criminal activities to an international level. Consequently, a global intervention is needed on the routes through which drugs circulate. Regional and international actors are required to engage in joint actions, both offensive and defensive, to defeat extremist groups. As for the internal problems in the Sahel countries, these can be solved at the local level by the state through better monitoring of resources and their equal and fair distribution, as well as by offering the civilian population alternative sources of integration and employment. The intervention of external powers, such as international organisations and other states, is vital to the dismantling of the narcoterrorist network in the Sahel.

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Mahsa Amini Protests: the Start of a Social Movement and Progressive Hegemony

George Horațiu Bontea

Abstract

The death of Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022, led to a series of protests in Iran against the Guidance Patrol, or the so-called “morality police”. The protests continue to unfold, but we may argue that they represent more than just the passing of the young Persian girl. This paper tried to interpret this occurrence as a backlash against the Iranian regime and its core values. Can the protests that followed Mahsa Amini’s death be seen as the start of a social movement, or perhaps a progressive hegemony? The research was centered on the attempt to comprehend the escalating and expanding nature of these responses in Iran and whether they might influence the Iranian society. The primary methodological instrument was the discourse analysis of the key actors and other relevant agents, such as state representatives or even members of the Guidance Patrol. Another key idea in the theoretical framework was Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, which enabled the research to explore the Iranian reform movement as a form of progressive hegemony in contemporary Iran that may eventually result in a shift in the country’s politics in terms of values and culture.

Keywords: Mahsa Amini, Guidance Patrol, Iranian society, cultural hegemony

Research design

On September 16, 2022, a young Iranian woman lost her life in the hospital after being arrested by the Guidance Patrol for not respecting the dress code established by clerical government standards. The cause of death was listed as a heart attack, however numerous witnesses claimed that members of the morality police beat the woman to death. Her killing was a structural issue in Iranian society and the oppression of women orchestrated by representatives of the religious authorities rather than merely an exception or a singular instance of abuse in the context of the Guidance Patrol.

Following her untimely passing, she became the face of a number of protests that persisted in more subdued forms, such as sporadic demonstrations or numerous women who continued to refuse to wear the hijab as a protest against the cleric rule of the state. Mahsa Amini is a national symbol of inspiration for the social movements battling injustice, therefore the topic would continue to inspire hope for Iranian women even if the protests were to decrease. The relevance of this topic is shown by indications of difficulties in Iran’s internal political order even more so than by actual events. Many academics portray Iran as a theocracy dominated by the rule of Ali Khamenei, but the demonstrations in response to the Mahsa Amini case or Narges Mohammadi’s

receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize are obvious indications of tensions in Iranian society. As a result, the future may change in favor of human rights, and particularly the dignity of women in Iran.

Starting from this issue, the goal of this paper is to analyse the impact of this protest and to understand if it has contributed to the development of social movements in Iran. In order to address this problem, the research will take a theoretical stance that has been influenced by Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony in order to comprehend the structural concepts of this context. The key research question is whether the protests that followed the killing of Mahsa Amini can be viewed as the start of a social movement, or perhaps a progressive hegemony. The goal is to examine the idea of social movement while taking Gramsci's critical view of cultural dominance into consideration. To sustain the main research question, there will be two secondary inquiries about the importance of the guidance patrol in Iranian culture: "What impact does the guidance patrol have on Iranian culture?" – and the message of the protestors – "What is the protestors' primary message?" – as a way to deepen the analysis.

In terms of methodology, attention will be given to the qualitative aspects of interpretation based on the information supplied in the reports of international indicators such as the Fragile State Index and the Social Progress Index. The Fragile State Index is an international indicator that analyses the way in which public policies influence essential aspects of the lives of citizens in the analysed states. The Social Progress Index is an international indicator specialised in identifying progress with particular attention to some aspects that, in their perspective, are defining for social well-being and are ranked based on a score from 0-100. The identified results will be analysed along with the discourse analysis from a postmodernist standpoint, where discourse should be seen as a socially constructed episteme and through its deconstruction, the research tries to comprehend the discourse's fundamental assumptions. All of this methodology is used to identify a potential progressive hegemon under the Gramsci theoretical framework.

Regarding the limitations in this paper, it should be stated that there aren't many primary sources available, as in the case of the "Morality Police," a murky institution. The fact that the discourse analysis of the protestors has a substantial influence on people's perspectives on the topics is another important shortcoming of this research.

A deconstruction of the Iranian identity

How actors perceive themselves in international relations is extremely important for how they will act in relation to each other. And, more often than not, international actors tend to outline a negative image of those they have a conflict within, in order to justify their opposition to them. Therefore, this practice outlines an "us and them" type of relationship, in which the two parties or even blocs perceive each other in the mirror and choose to highlight only the negative aspects. This is also the case of Iran in the status quo, which is outlined by the Western bloc as a deeply fundamentalist state and as a potential international security problem, but we must ask how realistic this perception is. In analysing the interaction with Iran, it is extremely important to understand the identity of this state, because by analysing the identity construction we can understand sensitive aspects that can facilitate dialogue and even a possible compromise. Thus,

two extremely important variables for understanding Iranian culture are: Persian heritage and Islamic Shiism and most relevant their embodiment in the Iranian identity.

Similar to other civilizations, the Iranian identity is based on elements related to mythology and history, but in the case of Iranians, these two often overlap³⁹⁷. The overlapping of mythological and historical elements leads to a duality of Iranians' perception of some aspects of their own identity, thus it can also explain the ambiguity of the Iranian discourse in certain circumstances, because it is stimulated by the duality of the internal discourse³⁹⁸. An illustrative example of this duality is the perception in Iranian culture of the creation of the world. Even though they are an Islamic theocracy, parallel to the myth of Adam, Iran also maintains a creation myth of the Persians. Jamshid³⁹⁹ is the first king recognized by divinity, and who leaves the world as a legacy to his three sons: Iradj, Sam and Tur. Each of them will take over a portion of their father's kingdom. Iradj received Iran and he too would outline the Iranian identity, Sam received the west, where the Europeans emerged and Tur received the east, which became Turan, the original place of the Turkic peoples. A conflict arose between them, due to the desire of the two older brothers to conquer Iran, which was their father's original territory. The conflict between these brothers is archetypal for how Iran has constructed its perception of interaction with its European and Turkish neighbours. This myth demonstrates how Iran has seen the construction of other civilizations over time and how it has built a perception of themselves.

The beginning of Persian history is marked by the founding of the Achaemenid Empire, the first Persian empire, by Cyrus the Great⁴⁰⁰ in 550 BC. Both Cyrus and this first form of organization are key moments in the history of Iran and have an extremely important value in shaping Persian civilization. The Achaemenid Empire is significant in terms of territorial expansion, as during this period Persia expanded westward into the Balkans and Eastern Europe and eastward as far as the Indus Valley. In parallel with the territorial expansion, the Achaemenid period was extremely important for the cultural development of Persia. Cultural factors developed such as the philosophy of truth promoted by the leaders of this empire, the Persian language, which was later influenced by the Arabic languages, and the Zoroastrian religion. In addition to aspects of Persian administration, it is important to consider the role played by some of the Persian kings. The first worth mentioning is the one who turned Persia into a great power, namely Cyrus the Great. He is the one who put an end to the Median dynasty over the Persians and who expanded the territory dominated by them. The establishment of the Persian Empire was not only a political achievement but was also part of the process of shaping a united civilization between the Persians and the Medes. He united the Persian peoples in the fight against the Medes, and, after his victory, he integrated the Medes into his kingdom, which gave him enormous credibility for which he is remembered to this day. In fact, he achieved a federation

³⁹⁷ Ali Mozaffari, *Forming National Identity in Iran the Idea of Homeland Derived from Ancient Persian and Islamic Imaginations of Place*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, pp. 33-54.

³⁹⁸ Alam Saleh and James Worrall, „Between Darius and Khomeini: Iran's national identity problematique”, in *National Identities*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2015, pp. 73-97, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2014.930426>, accessed on 23th of April 2023.

³⁹⁹ Ali M. Ansari, *Iran: a very short introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 22-29.

⁴⁰⁰ Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander A History of the Persian Empire*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002, pp. 13-30.

between several Persian and Mezic peoples, united by a common administration and led by a charismatic leader.

Paradoxically, the last dynasty before the Muslim revolution, the Sassanid dynasty, influenced the culture of the last dynasty before the installation of the Islamic theocracy in 1979, as both Pahlavi rulers tried to reduce the impact of Islam and return to Persian culture. Thus, the entire history of the Persian Empire, from Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes to the last dynasties of Pahlavi that followed the leadership of this people, significantly influenced the creation of the Iranian state and the administrative elements that form the basis of the leadership of Iran today. Also, their impact in the Iranian identity was significant and is extremely present in the status quo of the Iranian society, along with the values of Islam.

Following the Arab conquest of Persian territories in the 10th century, the population went through a process of Islamization through which their identity was significantly influenced by the values of Muhammad's religion. However, the method of assimilation of Islam did not represent the elimination of the original Persian identity, but, on the contrary, it helped to develop it by outlining a new dimension. The adoption of Islam as the majority religion contributed positively to the development of Persian culture. The adoption of Islam began by force due to the Arab conquest by the new caliph Abu Bakr⁴⁰¹, but, over time, it even became a reason to fight against the Arab conquerors. The adoption of Shi'ism⁴⁰² as the main branch of Islam in Persian territory facilitated the release and development of a unique monotheistic spiritual idea.

Shiism became a part of Persian identity and brought back the assertive spirit of the once glorious Persian Empire through the first Shiite Caliphate⁴⁰³. Thus, in the second period of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Persians held power and asserted the idea of Shiism as the true Islamic power that was to succeed Muhammad. But the power of the caliphate was already destabilized, and the Persians did not maintain the title of caliph for long. The Mongol conquest followed, and Shiism again became a minority within the Islamic religion that was concentrated in the area of Iran and other former Persian-held territories.

For a brief period in modern history, Iran was no longer a clerical state and underwent a process of secularization⁴⁰⁴. It all started in 1953 when, following a coup d'état, an absolute monarchy was established. Reza Pahlavi⁴⁰⁵ was an autocrat close to the West and especially the United States, as he was seen as a reformer of the Iranian state. It also represented a highly relevant trade opportunity due to Iran's geographic positioning in the region.

Against the background of these reforms to secularize the state and totalitarian measures, an opposition was created by some religious groups who wanted the removal of Reza Pahlavi. Many of these were not properly organized and did not have an impact on the domestic political

⁴⁰¹ Fereshteh Davaran, *Continuity in Iranian identity: resilience of a cultural heritage*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 136-168.

⁴⁰² Medea Benjamin, *Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, New York: OR Books, 2018, pp. 6-24.

⁴⁰³ Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, New Haven & Londra: New Haven & London, 2006, pp. 1-22.

⁴⁰⁴ Alam Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 45-59.

⁴⁰⁵ Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Londra: Taylor & Francis, 2014, pp. 205-209.

situation. The revolution began to take shape in 1979⁴⁰⁶ and was coordinated by Ruhollah Khomeini, who managed to organize the Iranian masses under the idea of an Islamic revolution. At first, this revolution was seen as favourable by many states in the West, because they believed that they would be able to establish good relations with a new leader and that a process of democratization of the state would begin. But things have taken a completely opposite turn to what the West had hoped would happen in the Iranian state. Khomeini publicly declared that he would fight the West and rule Iran with an iron fist to truly establish the Islamic Caliphate.

Thus, we can observe how the Iranian identity was shaped. Iran was at the base of the Persian statehood constituted by historical figures such as Cyrus or Darius I, who laid the foundations of state administration and culture. Another cultural heritage of the Persians that has influenced identity are certain sets of values that characterize Iranian society to this day. Mythology archetypally depicts how these values came into existence and persisted through time. Another legacy of implicit history and mythology was an antagonizing relationship with the West. Both Persians and Westerners have built up a negative perception of the other over time, which significantly affects the status quo interaction between Iran and Western countries. Another fundamental element of the Iranian identity was Islamism and the adoption of Shiism as the majority religion in Iran. In itself, the adoption of this religion was significantly influenced by the Arab conquest, but the Shia identity evolved according to the conflictual relationship with the Arab people who were mostly Sunni. Today, Iran is considered a theocracy, but continues to differentiate itself significantly from the rest of the Muslim countries⁴⁰⁷.

Nevertheless, what is surprising is the way in which Shi'ism merged with the Persian culture. Although we might have assumed that Islamism would have assimilated the Persian element and erased Persian culture from the collective psyche, we can see how this did not happen. Even though various leaders tried to prioritize a certain part of the identity⁴⁰⁸, Iranian values remained constantly influenced by both contexts. Precisely for this reason, Iran has developed as a unique entity in the domestic and international framework, coexisting between these identity elements.

Mahsa Amini as a push factor for the social movements for women in Iran

It is imperative to comprehend the institution of "Morality Police," formally known as Gasht-e-Ershad, which translates to Guidance Patrol, before delving into the terrible case of Mahsa Amini's death and its cultural impact⁴⁰⁹. A branch of the Iranian religious police is responsible for the enforcement of Islamic dress codes, such as ensuring women in the country

⁴⁰⁶ Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*, New York, Oxford Academic, 2006, pp. 77-104.

⁴⁰⁷ Shahram Akbarzadeh and James Barry, "State Identity in Iranian Foreign Policy" in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 43, Issue 4, pp. 613-629 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2016.1159541>, accessed on 19th April 2023.

⁴⁰⁸ Alam Saleh, "Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, Issue 3, 2013, pp. 342-343, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2013.808915>, accessed on 5th May 2023.

⁴⁰⁹ Monir Ghaedi, "Who are Iran's 'morality police'?", *Deutsche Welle*, 2022, [<https://www.dw.com/en/who-are-irans-morality-police/a-63200711>], accessed on 7th June 2023.

wear hijabs. In an effort to maintain control on the Islamic attire and the remnants of the erstwhile Islamic Revolution Committees, former hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad founded the Guidance Patrol in 2005⁴¹⁰.

Immediately following the revolution in 1979, the Islamic Revolution Committee was established with the primary objective of suppressing counterrevolutionary groups and serving as a crucial apparatus for the authority of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The Komiteh's function shifted over its existence to become more of an enforcer of Islamic laws governing social behaviour, particularly the oppression that persists to this day in the activities of the morality police, as a result of the religious Supreme Leader's growing influence. The fact that this institution only responds to the Supreme Leader and is therefore heavily affected by its interpretation of Sharia Law is the most crucial point that needed to be made clear. This division of power only serves to highlight how reliant Iranian society is on Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Despite numerous protests and movements denouncing oppression, it remains unclear whether the Guidance Patrol was abolished, despite the confirmation of key figures such as the General Attorney⁴¹¹. Tragically, Armita Geravand's brain death in October 2023 marked the beginning of another horrific case of abuse by the morality police.

Regarding the events of 2022, following the passing of the young Persian girl⁴¹², there was a wave of social unrest and protests in Iran that were regarded as the regime's largest since 1979. The message of the protestors evolved into a more widespread act of defiance against the autocratic religious state, and they even went global in their support of Iran's institutionalised abuse against women. A closer examination of the primary elements of the indicators included in the research design of this paper might provide even more insight into these attitudes.

The Social Progress Index⁴¹³ has three components that focus on basic human needs, the foundations of wellbeing, and opportunity. The basic human needs variable looks at the fundamental rights of human dignity, to examine whether the state in question satisfies a minimal need or performs better in this regard. Iran performs well in this category, scoring 83.66 out of 100, suggesting some degree of personal stability. The foundations of well-being centre on gauging the standard of living of residents by examining their access to the necessities of life. It is in this context that social concerns in Iran become apparent, since Iran's low score of merely 67.56 indicates a lack of equality among its citizens. The analysis of opportunities available to the residents of the state examined represents the last component of the social development Index. Its 45.93 score further demonstrates the lack of development made by most social groups. When examining the results holistically, it becomes evident that, while the Iranian government does a

⁴¹⁰ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 114-116.

⁴¹¹ Siavash Ardalan and Marita Moloney, "Uncertainty over Iran's morality police after official's 'disbanded' remarks", *BBC Persian*, December 2022, [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-63850656>], accessed on 8th June 2023.

⁴¹² Azam Khatam, "Mahsa Amini's killing, state violence, and moral policing in Iran", *Human Geography*, Volume 16, Issue 3, 20th of March 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/19427786231159357>, accessed on 10th of June 2023.

⁴¹³ Global Index, "2022 Social Progress Index", *Global Index: Overview*, Washington: Social Progress Imperative, 2022, pp. 1-18, [https://www.socialprogress.org/static/8a62f3f612c8d40b09b3103a70bdacab/2022%20Social%20Progress%20Index%20Executive%20Summary_4.pdf], accessed on 14th June 2023.

good job in protecting human decency, there is still a barrier that prevents its citizens from experiencing advancement. This is a significant finding that ties in with the discourse of frustration that has been stoked by the morality police abuses that has affected demonstrations.

Moving to the Fragile State Index⁴¹⁴ and considering the research interests of this paper, it will only be analysed based on three of its four components: cohesion, political, and opportunity indicators. The cohesiveness section describes a highly developed sense of collective grievance and polarised elites, which are genuinely manifested in protests against the state and religious authorities. By comparing the results of the social indicator (which has a respectable score on all of these criteria) with the political indicator, we obtain an important viewpoint on a highly critical topic in state legitimacy, human rights, and the rule of law, which is particularly interesting. The findings of this indicator, once more, provide a greater range of explanations for the civil unrest among Iranians and demonstrate how Mahsa Amini's passing was the final straw in a long list of problems that the government, which is reliant on the Ayatollah's parallel state, has refused to address.

A new social movement for women in Iran was born out of all these socioeconomic realities, which perhaps served as a springboard for women who were oppressed by Islam⁴¹⁵. The movement began with the protests following the terrible death of Mahsa Amini. "Woman, Life, Freedom" became a popular phrase during the Mahsa Amini inspired protests and eventually became a social movement after taking into account various aspects. A moral, emotional, and cognitive dissonance existed between "we and them"; both the phrase and the Mahsa case depicted an empty signifier that was succeeded by a chain of equivalencies, a visible intersection of political, economic, and cultural elements, and, by the conclusion of the protests, even a structured organisation.

The first factor that is evidently present in this movement is the divide between "we and them," which is symbolised as "we", the oppressed women, and "them", the political and religious elites, who are divided by the moral obligation to uphold the Islamic dress code and, in some cases, even go further in the case of women's rights and dignity in Islamic society. The protests were the peak moment of dissonance⁴¹⁶ in the moral conflict between the Iranian citizens and the political infrastructure of the state.

The concept of empty signifier⁴¹⁷, which is a symbol that implies more than a particular instance and has the capacity to combine and create a chain of equivalency between structural problems that the movement ought to concentrate on resolving, is the second factor. Mahsa Amini came to represent this emancipation movement for women, precisely because citizens had the

⁴¹⁴ Fund for Peace, "Fragile State Index", *Fund for Peace*, 2022, Iran-Country Dashboard, [https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/], accessed on 17th of June 2023.

⁴¹⁵ Negin Hosseini Goodrich, "Say Her Name, Mahsa Amini! An overview of the Women, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran" in Yahya R. Kamalipour and John V. Pavlik (eds.), *Communicating Global Crises: Media, War, Climate, and Politics*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023, pp. 151-170.

⁴¹⁶ Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015, pp. 31-45.

⁴¹⁷ Ernesto Laclau, "Deconstruction, Pragmatism, Hegemony", in Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 49-70.

courage to speak out against the Ayatollah's autocratic leadership and articulate the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom," which demonstrated the connection between a women's social group and their right to life, particularly the right to live in freedom.

The point where political, economic, and cultural domains converge⁴¹⁸ is the third factor. The primary topic being addressed in "Women, Life, Freedom" is religious tyranny and its manifestation of oppression towards women. Religious dictatorship is part of all three because it has roots in politics, influences the economy, and, most notably, is an actor with a significant influence on the production of culture.

The fourth factor is the existence of an organized structure⁴¹⁹. It may be claimed that this final section is missing; yet, in the process of developing from only a slogan to an established social framework of the movement, it comes very close. It started out as merely the idea of a collective attitude, which the slogan symbolised. Later, by adhering to the values implied by the slogan, a clear platform with significant outcomes (such #EyesOnIran or the Open Letter signed both domestically and internationally) was created.

Beyond these preconditions for a social movement, one may argue that the current events in Iran go beyond simple protests and have the potential to culturally transform the Iranian society and mark the beginning of the end for the Ayatollah's autocratic regime. These cultural changes could be explained by the critical analysis of Antonio Gramsci's famous Cultural Hegemony⁴²⁰. Mainly, cultural hegemony is represented by more than the typical Marxist class rule of the economy and investigates the cultural aspects of society. Cultural hegemony is represented by the values and norms of a society that are dictated and controlled by the elites and dominated based on power. But it is essential to understand that power can never be maintained by force or repression alone. It depends on coercion and consensus⁴²¹, which are dialectically related. According to Gramsci's theory, the status quo in Iran is characterised by a regressive hegemony that is supported by the state, which is represented in this case by the political and religious elites. This is primarily because the state is the main force behind the creation of the cultural elements. Moreover, it is possible that the emergence of a progressive hegemony brought about by a sense of popular collective spirit preceded the beginnings of this movement.

Are these shifts an indication that the real regressive hegemony is losing its consensus? Rather, it is a matter of time and, clearly, a significant reform to break free from the Iranian state's real power structure. However, a new stage of Iranian society has already begun, as seen by the demonstrations that took place throughout the months of protests and the substantial number of women who continue to demonstrate their disapproval of the Islamic dress code. Even more, it should be emphasised that progressive hegemony does not necessarily reside in the realm of the state or a dominant elite; it can emerge in subordinate classes if these can share a new ideology,

⁴¹⁸ Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 89-113.

⁴¹⁹ Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes Collective Action in the Information Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 89-112.

⁴²⁰ Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, pp. 169-178.

⁴²¹ Richard Howson and Kylie Smith, "Hegemony and the Operation of Consensus and Coercion", in Richard Howson and Kylie Smith (eds.), *Hegemony Studies in Consensus and Coercion*, New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 1-15.

thus creating a new “collective will” or the “war of positions”⁴²². “Women, Life, Freedom” has the power to upend the status quo for women in Iran and establish a counterculture. It presents a significant reworking of the current situation of women in Iran and in Islamic societies, and generates widespread support for this reworking among Iranians.

Conclusions

This objective of this paper was to examine the social conflicts in the Iranian society by beginning with an understanding of the Iranian identity. The dual nature of Iran still has elements of both Twelver Shi’ism in Islam and Persian civilization. With regard to the treatment of women and the abusive practises of the Morality Police, Mahsa Amini’s passing marked a high point in the public’s annoyance. It sparked a significant wave of demonstrations and numerous other types of cultural expressions that opposed the regime ruled by religion. “Women, Life, Freedom” is no longer just a catchphrase or an empowering symbol; rather, it is a social movement that defends the dignity and human rights of Iranian women as well as of those in other Islamic nations.

The objective of this social movement, which includes the aforementioned #EyesOnIran and the Open Letter, as well as the influence of the researchers and activists who are a part of it, are internal indicators of its success. After the campaign earned the Sakharov Prize⁴²³ for its social impact on Iranian society—but more crucially, for raising awareness of women’s apartheid in Iran and other Islamic countries—their efforts were even acknowledged abroad. Sadly, the success was not the only factor—in October, a second girl lost her life as a result of the morality police abusing their authority. The movement’s social mobilisation and the widespread support for Mahsa Amini as a symbol, however, point to a potential shift and an end to the Ayatollah’s regressive hegemony, which may crumble in the face of the cultural revolution. Every one of these developments will signify new cultural elements of gender in Islamic countries as well as significant academic topics about women in Iran and even widening of the social movements in other Islamic countries.

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⁴²² Nicolina Montesano Montessori, “Multimodal Narrative as an Instrument for Social Change: Reinventing Democracy in Spain—The Case of 15 M” in *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines*, Vol. 7 Issue 2, 2015, doi: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272151517_Multimodal_Narrative_as_an_Instrument_for_Social_Change_Reinventing_Democracy_in_Spain-The_Case_of_15_M], accessed on 17th June 2023.

⁴²³ Press room, “Jina Mahsa Amini and Iranian women protest movement win the 2023 Sakharov Prize”, *European Parliament*, 19th October 2023, [<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20231013IPR07134/jina-mahsa-amini-and-iranian-women-protest-movement-win-the-2023-sakharov-prize>], accessed on 24th October 2023.

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Traits and Trends in Contemporary Cultural Journalism in Romania

- the case of local newspapers -

Iulia-Anamaria Ghidiu

Abstract

The present paper investigates the status quo of cultural journalism in Romania focusing on the local market. Our research is addressing exclusively newspaper articles and not those published in specialized arts and culture magazines. Relying on qualitative and quantitative research methods, we remarked the limited amount and local impact of professional cultural news in the print media, challenged by the emerging digital or the audiovisual alternatives as well as by the small number of cultural journalists in the province and the decreasing incentives for culture in general particularly among the youth, though exceptions exist. This specific type of media has its individual traits while also intertwining with a range of fields. A collective effort is needed to bring about change by extending the audience of cultural events.

Keywords: cultural journalism, discourse, dedicated page, cultural events, negotiating boundaries

Research design

To research on the topic, the strategy involved both qualitative and quantitative instruments. We have conducted interviews with two cultural journalists residing in Cluj-Napoca, we have applied a discourse analysis to various cultural articles in the local and the national press and we have resorted to statistical data about culture-related articles. Additionally, a questionnaire covering an audience of 144 people has helped confirm some of the trends identified in contemporary cultural media.

The article aims to respond to the following questions: (1) What is the urgency /relevance/ dimension of cultural information nowadays compared to other subjects of large interest? (2) How does the local media discourse on cultural topics differ from other types of information in the press? (3) What can be done to draw the audience's attention more to this kind of information?

Introduction

The current global context, the medium and long-term consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic and especially the security challenges manifesting in our immediate vicinity determine the majority of media workers to concentrate more and more on hard topics, such as human and

environmental security, politics, migration, hybrid threats. To a large extent, this is understandable due to the importance and topicality of the subject. However, other topics, discussed rather in the soft paradigm, should not be underestimated in terms of importance and contribution to knowledge.

There are scholars arguing that structural trends such as globalisation, digitalization and conglomeration, each of them with their particular tensions, raise a challenge to cultural journalism idiosyncrasies. That is, the argument goes, specificities of cultural news interfere and exchange styles with other journalistic fields, and we can distinguish a diversification and “newsification” of this type of media, while also spotting traits that characterize cultural journalism – analytical thinking, interpretation, subjectivity – influencing other media.⁴²⁴

Challenges are thus reflected in “negotiating the boundaries”, as sometimes journalists face pressure from the organizations they work for to conceive texts in a way that makes them “clickable”. As a matter of consequence, cultural subjects may not be accurately distinguished from societal debates, for instance.⁴²⁵

Following a number of restrictions imposed by authorities worldwide in the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cultural sector has been affected by the reduction and even the absence of face-to-face public events for a specific period of time. Therefore, the explosion of cultural and artistic events nowadays is somehow explainable given the aforementioned situation. Considering this, we believe that media coverage should target the cultural subjects at the proper pace and a second argument would be that cultural and artistic events keep the cities and the communities alive and interconnected. This affirmation is valid for both the national and the local press.

In a 2021 opinion article, journalist Brîndușa Armanca mentioned the broadened concept of cultural journalism in the digital era, a concept that now covers much more than before, including creative and entertainment industries, fashion, gaming and even gastronomy.⁴²⁶

The perceived relevance of cultural information

Generally speaking, as the results showed, the cultural press in major Romanian cities (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Iași) has entered a grey zone. Even though there is a vast cultural activity in these areas (multiple, sometimes overlapping events going on), the cultural press, especially in the province, is not able to capture everything. By interviewing a journalist bearing a wide experience on the cultural activity in Cluj-Napoca and not only, we have identified various reasons for that grey zone:

⁴²⁴ Nete Nørgaard Kristensen & Kristina Riegert, “The Tensions of the Cultural News Beat”, *Journalism Practice*, vol. 15, issue 9, 2021, 1329-1343.

⁴²⁵ Kristina Riegert, “Negotiating Boundaries in a Changing Media Ecosystem: The Case of Swedish Cultural Journalism”, *Journalism Studies*, Volume 22, issue 4, 418-434.

⁴²⁶ Brîndușa Armanca, *Jurnalismul cultural, o himeră?*, 2021 [<https://putereaacincea.ro/jurnalismul-cultural-o-himera/>], accessed October 31, 2023.

A small number of cultural journalists in the province, dedicated people and knowledgeable about the various cultural dimensions (performing arts: opera, theatre, puppetry, philharmonic, folkloric events, ballet, musical etc., visual arts: painting, sculpture, design, ceramics, photography, cartoons etc., and literature). In Cluj-Napoca, relevant names include: Cristina Beligăr, Adrian Țion, Eugen Cojocaru, Demostene Șofron, Tiberiu Fărcaș and late Ilie Călian and Michaela Bocu.

In general, young students in major Romanian cities attending specialized faculties (journalism, communication sciences) are less interested in working for daily newspapers; their attention is mainly oriented towards a television or radio broadcasting career. Minodora Sălcudean, associate professor at “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, discussed in 2019 about the optional course of cultural journalism that she was teaching to second-year students. Few students were interested in this topic, opting instead for another optional course, focused on social journalism. The professor believed that, prior to cultural journalism, young people should be attracted by what culture means. This type of media has many inevitable connections with other domains, such as politics, ideology, sociology, anthropology, or religion, she argued.⁴²⁷

Our interviewee also discussed the reduced interest of the young generation in reading and attending cultural and artistic events or going to the library, compared to their growing attraction for digital tools; we consider this is debatable, though, as nowadays classic and digital means interfere significantly.

Generally, we found out that, in various printed newspapers in Cluj-Napoca, articles approaching cultural and artistic topics were few. By contrast, in Bucharest, the capital city, there are more cultural journalists currently active in the printed media, just like we can find in Western countries.

To provide a brief statistical example, we have analysed the number of articles on cultural topics published in various newspapers in Cluj-Napoca on May 12, 2023. Thus,

- *Făclia de Cluj*, a daily newspaper, has a dedicated page, sometimes two pages, investigating the cultural activity in the city and in the county as well (redactor and collaborators). In the analysed edition, three extended articles have been published (extended = half of a page) concerning cultural issues, two of which on the front page.⁴²⁸
- *Monitorul de Cluj* (daily newspaper), in the printed edition (weekend edition), has published three extended articles on culture, on a page dedicated to leisure (Page 2).⁴²⁹
- *Ziua de Cluj* (daily newspaper) has not published in its printed edition any article on culture.⁴³⁰

As an observation, popular areas covered by these three newspapers include: local administration, economics, national politics, international relations, sport, social issues, publicity.

⁴²⁷ Oana Ciucă Lázár, *Jurnalismul cultural poate fi un antrenor consistent pentru minte și spirit*, 2019 [<https://capitalcultural.ro/jurnalismul-cultural-poate-fi-un-antrenor-consistent-pentru-minte-si-spirit/>], accessed October 31, 2023.

⁴²⁸ Iulia Ghidui, “Zeci de instituții își deschid la unison porțile”, *Făclia de Cluj*, May 12, 2023, p.1.; *Idem*, “Omagiu poetului luminii”, *Făclia de Cluj*, May 12, 2023, p.1.

⁴²⁹ *Monitorul de Cluj*, May 12, 2023.

⁴³⁰ *Ziua de Cluj*, May 12, 2023.

- Ziarul de Iași (daily newspaper) has a weekly supplement on culture.⁴³¹

At a national level, the situation is as follows:

- Jurnalul Național (daily newspaper) has published two extended articles on culture, not on a dedicated page⁴³²;
- Adevărul, in its weekend supplement, has dedicated two pages to arts and literature (the analysed edition – one extended article on cinematography)⁴³³.

Regarding statistics, an observation is needed. The range and dimension of cultural news in the local press can vary depending on the time frame and the period of the year, as there are seasons abounding with events and seasons with less cultural and artistic activity. However, opinions vary to a certain extent, as we found out in an interview with a radio broadcaster in Cluj-Napoca hosting various editions with influential cultural actors. She believed that local cultural journalism in Cluj, probably surprising many, is currently rejoicing a truly flourishing period that is desirable to last. She actually attributed this trend to the wide spectrum of cultural activities (large festivals, many cultural operators, a lively independent cultural sector) going on in the Transylvanian city where people are tasting this type of events.

Media discourse on cultural issues

Regarding the type of discourse that cultural media (printed newspapers) in Romania usually approach, we underline the following characteristics:

- an extended use of metaphors and epithets;
- a specific terminology for each artistic sub-field is imposed; a critical paradigm (qualified opinion) is often exposed;
- headlines denominate the specific artistic field, or they leave the reader curious to discover the topic throughout the material by using comprehensive (literary) quotes, sometimes, the headline is represented by or it includes a rhetorical question;
- generally, it resembles articles on other topic in the case of inserting small quotes/declarations and following a typical structure (over-headline, headline, introduction, content, subheadings, signature);
- the content of cultural materials appeals to both the mind and the soul, it creates a direct connection with the reader;
- some local newspapers struggle to cover as much as possible, not only online mainstream events with national or even international impact.

Moreover, discussing with the radio presenter, we understood that the cultural journalist must acquire additional abilities and competences as opposed to generalist media agents. Thus,

⁴³¹ *Suplimentul de cultură*, May 8 – 14, 2023 [https://suplimentuldecultura.ro/numarpdf/811-XxNGX-PDF_SDC_811_low-res.pdf], accessed May 12, 2023.

⁴³² Ionuț Bălan, "Cum s-au chinezărit Oscarurile și Nobelurile. Se compară un Oscar / Nobel din epoca pre-QE cu unul din prezent?", *Jurnalul național*, May 12, 2023, p 7.

⁴³³ Ana-Maria Șchiopu, "Patriarhat, rasism și boli mintale. Cât adevăr încapă într-o ficțiune istorică?", *Adevărul weekend plăcut*, May 12 – 14, 2023, pp. 24 – 25.

cultural journalism implies a comprehensive, in-depth approach of the subjects, a continuous specialization, so that the journalist can knowledgeably give their opinion on the event. Addressing a specific, exigent audience, he/she must go deep into the topic, while also using the power of contextualization, connecting the dots and drawing parallels to broaden people's horizon and proposing innovative interpretations. In brief, cultural news not only reflect or describe an event, but they also impress through the analytical dimension, placing facts into a much broader discourse.

Extending and engaging the audience

As far as our investigation went, we understand that there is an obvious need to do more in order to attract the audience more to the cultural topics in mass-media. One possible way would be by creating/perpetuating an individual behaviour in our circles that implies the regular attendance of cultural and artistic events and thus, the need, the curiosity to search for more information on this. Another possibility involves the greater popularization of cultural topics within specialized higher education institutions (journalism, communication sciences) and the attraction of young students to this kind of dedicated media.

The interviewees underlined the need to forge a taste for cultural activities step-by-step, as part of a long-term strategy, starting in the early ages, and thus the school environment plays an indispensable role in this context. Children should be encouraged to read, watch movies, attend theatrical plays and to develop a critical thinking in order to become a consumer of a wide variety of cultural products, including the cultural media.

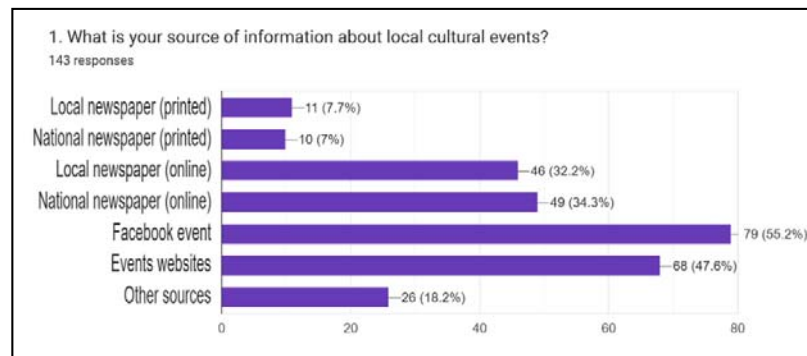
Professor Elena M. Cîmpan, writer and member of the Union of Professional Journalists of Romania, pleaded in 2020 for the educational dimension of cultural journalism, which she considered also a means of using the native language correctly and of adopting a critical attitude.⁴³⁴

A quantitative approach to cultural news

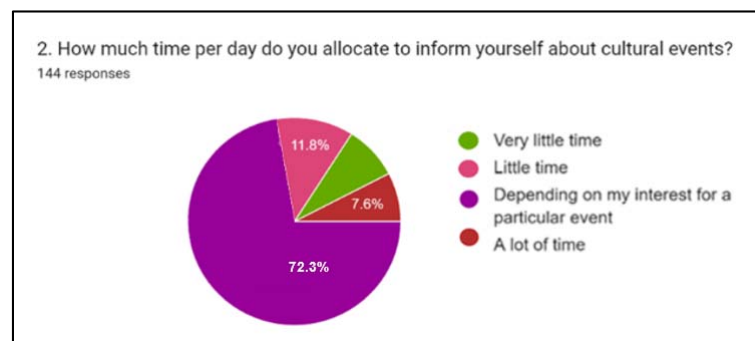
To complement research upon the topic, we have developed a questionnaire, applied to a number of 144 people in Romania, residing in different cities across the country and bearing a varied professional background. As resulted, 72.2% are women, and 27.8% men, the majority of the respondents (70.1%) live in a big city and the age range is 20 to 90 years.

The first question was aimed at identifying the source that most people use to inform themselves about cultural events organized at local level. It resulted that Facebook is the most preferred platform (55.2%), whereas local printed newspapers only mattered for 7.7% of the target audience.

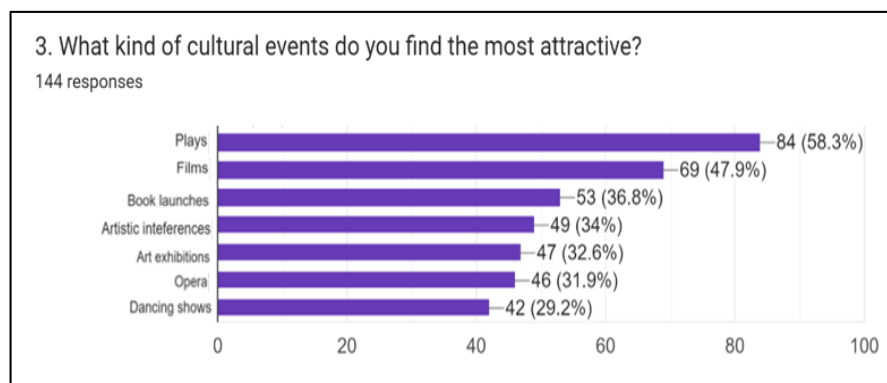
⁴³⁴ Elena M. Cîmpan, *Jurnalism cultural*, 2020 [<https://www.bistritaculturala.ro/stire/jurnalism-cultural-2973.html>], accessed October 31, 2023.



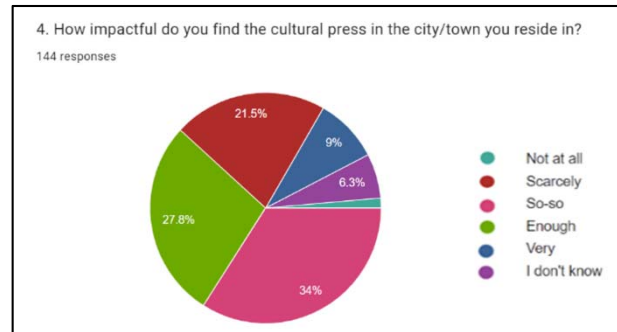
The time allocated to information depends on the importance of a certain event for a particular person, as results showed. 11.8% of the respondents stated that they usually spend little time reading cultural news, and 8.3% allocate very little time.



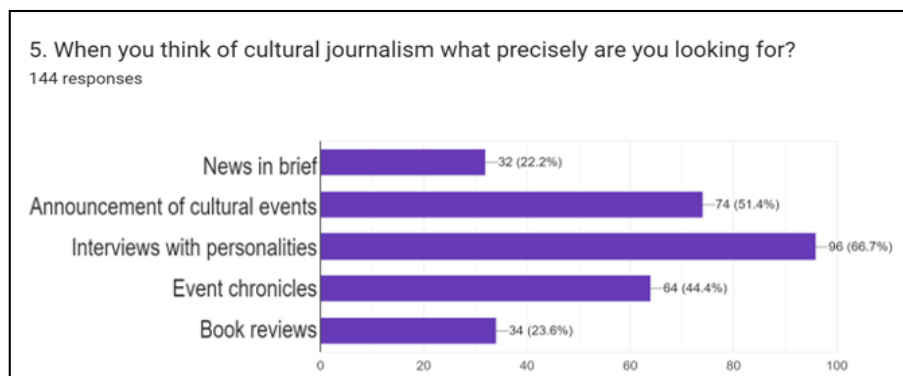
We can observe that theatrical plays are the most sought-after type of cultural events, followed closely by films and then by book launches and artistic interferences, as displayed in the picture below.



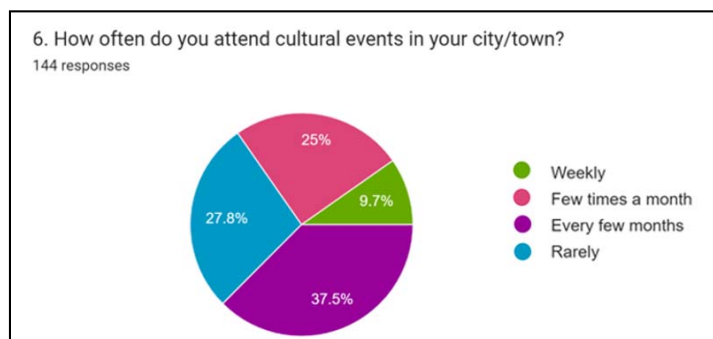
Discussing the grey-zone paradigm when it comes to cultural journalism in Romania, people's options reflected this tendency as well. Only 9% consider this type of media has a strong impact at local level. Most of the respondents (34%) opted for an average impact and 21.5% believed cultural journalism is weak news.



Interviews are the most enticing pieces of cultural news (66.7%), followed by event announcements (51.4%) and chronicles (44.4%).



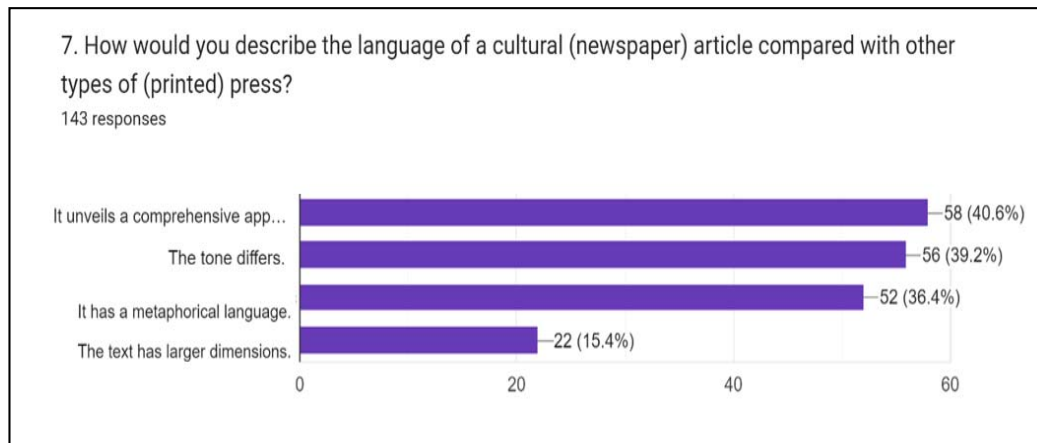
Even though cultural and artistic events may flourish, especially in major cities in Romania, and some people have developed a taste for this leisure activities, the majority of the people in the target group (37.5%) affirmed they chose to attend these events every few months. 27.8% declared that they are rare attenders.



Respondents emphasized the difference in discourse that characterizes cultural articles, considering that they entail a metaphorical language, a distinct tone, and a comprehensive approach, in accordance with the other findings, theoretical and empirical.

In many cases, family accounted for the most influential environment (57.3%) stimulating the curiosity of individuals for cultural events. Respondents also considered their circle of friends

(46.9%) and education institutions (33.6%) as responsible for the choices they make. Interestingly, the local press only scored 15.4% in the public's preferences. Work colleagues also have a reduced influence (16.8%).



Conclusions

Nowadays, cultural journalism is striving to secure its place among the various types of news, in printed or online version. However, its impact is currently limited, or average at best, and local newspapers fail to be the favored means of information for most people, in a fierce competition with digital media platforms.

Even if major cities impress with a generous cultural agenda –appealing especially to the cultivated audience –, the press cannot capture everything, and one reason for that is, of course, the small number of specialized journalists (mainly in the province). Also, not all the local newspapers have designed a dedicated page for cultural and artistic events and the frequency of specialised media articles varies.

It is generally agreed that cultural journalism represents something different from other news and, consequently, the discourse has its particularities. These refer to the tone, the language, the journalist's own perspective and a tendency for contextualization. Many times, the author develops a tight relation with cultural agents, and he/she follows attentively the evolution of one's career.

Obviously, efforts should be made to expand and engage more the audience of cultural and artistic manifestations and usually people attribute a collective responsibility for this ambitious endeavour. In this context, the school environment can have a significant contribution to one's cultural preferences and, also, to stimulate more the youth's interest in the print media, challenged by the diversity of audiovisual and online alternatives.

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